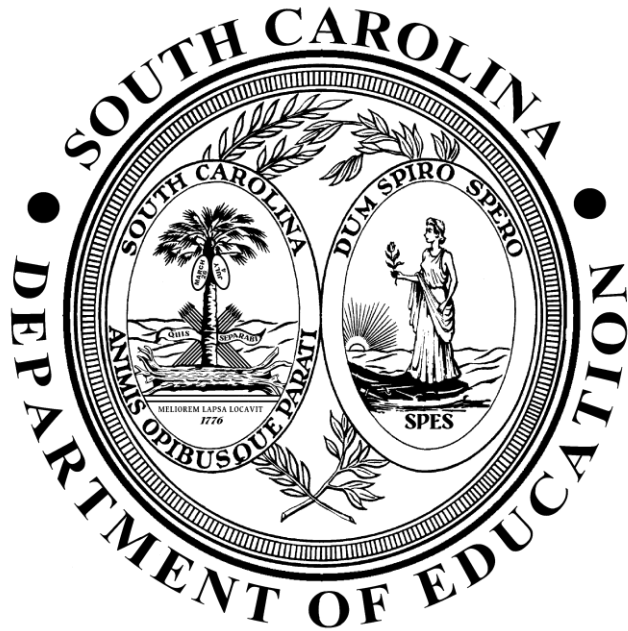


STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Report Summarizing Services Provided Under the Individuals with
Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to Preschool Children with
Disabilities 2022-23 School Year

Provided to the Interagency Coordinating Council, the Senate Finance
Committee, the House Ways and Means Committee, the Senate
Education Committee, and the House Education and Public Works

Pursuant to Act 86, Chapter 36 of Title 59 of the Amended Code of Laws of South
Carolina, 1976

February 1, 2024

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February 1, 2024

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The preschool committee of the Advisory Council for Educating Students with Disabilities (ACESD) is pleased to present its 2024 Annual Report of services provided to children ages three through five, and corresponding recommendations. The committee is charged with the important responsibility of identifying and studying key issues in special education and early intervention and advising and assisting the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE), Office of Special Education Services (OSES).

The 2024 Annual Report and resulting recommendations are pursuant to Act 86 of 1993, Chapter 36 of Title 59 of the Amended Code of Laws of South Carolina, 1976. The recommendations of the preschool committee of the ACESD include the following:

Examine COVID-related impacts in the early childhood population. The number of children qualifying with disabilities in both Part C and Part B continues to grow. The Council would like to further examine COVID-related impacts upon South Carolina’s youngest learners.

Continue to expand Pyramid Model practices. The Council acknowledges concerns regarding suspension and expulsion of children ages birth to five from both child care and school settings. In an effort to decrease the children and families affected by suspension and expulsion, the Council recommends that the OSES continue to work to expand Pyramid Model practices to include both training and implementation in LEAs.

Continue to provide support to LEAs on inclusion and least restrictive environment (LRE). The Council also acknowledges that data indicates many preschool children with disabilities, especially three-year-old’s, continue to be served in the separate classroom, away from non-disabled peers, which affects the social, communication, and academic skills of students with disabilities. The Council recommends that the OSES continue to provide support to districts as needed to provide a continuum of placements for preschool children with disabilities. When LEAs practice inclusion, it is expected that the state will see the impact of such changes

throughout the child's school career, leading to increased graduation rates and post-school outcomes.

The 2022-23 school year had an overall increase of 885 preschool-age children receiving special education services compared to the prior year. Autism, Developmental Delay, and Speech or Language Impairment continue to be the most common disability categories among preschool-age children. It is imperative that preschool programs and educators be supported to ensure that children are able to obtain the support they need. By providing high quality learning experiences for preschool children, the state will see children start school ready to learn and be equipped with the skills, information and supports they need for kindergarten readiness and lifelong success.

Thank you for your consideration of the thoughtful study and recommendations contained in this report.

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Background

Act 86 of 1993 requires LEAs to serve children with disabilities ages three through five. This state mandate represented a downward extension of all the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Public Law 101–476. One of the stipulations of the state mandate is the requirement for the submission of a report to the South Carolina General Assembly by February 1 of each year that includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- the SCDE initiatives related to preschool programs for children with disabilities.
- data and program information from LEAs related to activities involving the Child Find process and LEA services.
- updates of policies and procedures for preschool programs for children with disabilities.
- financial information pertaining to implementation of preschool programs for children with disabilities.
- information collected from other state agencies providing services for preschool children with disabilities, including the Commission for the Blind; the Department of Disabilities and Special Needs; the Department of Health and Environmental Control; the Department of Mental Health; the Division of Continuum of Care for Emotionally Disturbed Children; the Office of the Governor; the School for the Deaf and the Blind; and the State Department of Social Services. Information collected includes the following:
 - pertinent program data,
 - financial information,
 - pertinent policies and procedures related to programs for preschool children with disabilities.

The stipulations are outlined in the legislation for preschool children with disabilities, Act 86, Chapter 36 of Title 59 of the Amended Code of Laws of South Carolina, 1976.

Executive Summary

This report summarizes the initiatives by the SCDE’s Office of Special Education Services (OSES) to provide a comprehensive system of service for preschool children with disabilities in the 2022–23 school year. The sections provide data on the number of preschool children with disabilities in South Carolina receiving special education during the school year; who they are and where they received their services; available state and federal funds; and initiatives and services provided on behalf of preschool children with disabilities and their families by LEAs, state agencies, and Head Start programs. Recommendations are included in the report based upon stakeholder feedback collected throughout the year.

Section I: Data for Programs for Preschool Children with Disabilities

Part B of the IDEA requires the SCDE to submit to the United States Department of Education (ED), Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), a certified count, annually, of the number of children with disabilities receiving special education and related services through Individual Education Programs. Children ages three through five are included in this Child Count Report each year, based upon a child’s age as of the data collection date (defined as the fourth Tuesday in October, annually). Preschool children can begin receiving services on their third birthday, regardless of when it occurs. Therefore, the annual Child Count information does not reflect the

total number of students who received services during any entire school year. Data will be presented in each age category where available, as well as a total of all three age categories.

Population and Age

According to the Child Count data collected on October 25, 2022, for the 2022–23 school year, 6,647 children with disabilities ages three through five (not yet kindergarten) received special education services in South Carolina:

- 2,593 three-year-old's,
- 3,405 four-year-old's, and
- 649 five-year-old's (not yet in kindergarten).

Of the total number of three through five-year-old's (not yet in kindergarten), 1,922 were female (28.92 percent) and 4,725 were males (71.08 percent). The four-year-old category is the age at which the largest number of students with disabilities are served.

The ED, OSEP instructed that beginning in the 2020–21 school year, kindergarten students were to be excluded from the count, whereas they had been included in previous years. This gives a true picture of preschool-age children. However, for comparison, if children in kindergarten were included in the count, that would be an additional 4,281 children, which would bring the total number of children ages three, four and five receiving special education services to 10,928, which is greater than the number of children served pre-pandemic.

Table 1. Five-Year Trend of Children Ages 3–5 (not yet kindergarten) Receiving Special Education Services

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Age 3	2,019	2,209	1,586	2,150	2,593
Age 4	3,095	3,332	2,768	2,950	3,405
Age 5 (not yet kindergarten)	4,678	4,858	596*	662*	649*
Total	9,792	10,399	4,950	5,762	6,647

Note: Source of data is IDEA, Part B, Section 618, 2022 Child Count.

**Beginning in the 2020–21 school year, kindergarten aged children were not included in the Age 5 count per USED, OSEP guidelines.*

Ethnicity or Race

The 2022 Child Count lists eight ethnic categories, with one being “unknown”. Specific numbers are not reported if there are 10 or less in a category for confidentiality reasons and are identified with an asterisk. No children were in the “unknown” ethnic category; thus, this category is not included below. Data indicates the following for three through five-year-old's (not yet kindergarten) with disabilities:

- 0.26 percent American Indian,
- 1.53 percent Asian,
- 31.38 percent Black or African American,

- 12.40 percent Hispanic or Latino,
- * Percent Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander,
- 6.47 percent Two or more races, and
- 47.92 percent White.

Of the different ethnicities, 5,961 children, or 89.68 percent do not have Limited English Proficiency and 686 children or 10.32 percent do have Limited English Proficiency.

Primary Disability

Section 300.8 of the IDEA defines categories of disabilities for which a child may be evaluated and provided specialized services.

For 2022–23, the data below indicates the number of children identified in each category:

- 19.68 percent or 1,308 Autism Spectrum Disorder,
- * percent or * Deaf-Blindness,
- 41.90 percent or 2,785 Developmental Delay,
- 1.01 percent or 67 Hearing Impairment
- * Percent or * Intellectual Disability,
- 1.04 percent or 69 Multiple Disabilities,
- 0.32 percent or 21 Orthopedic Impairment,
- 1.76 percent or 117 Other Health Impairment,
- 33.67 percent or 2,238 Speech or Language Impairment
- * percent or * Traumatic Brain Injury, and
- 0.42 percent or 28 Visual Impairment.

The percentage of students identified with a Developmental Delay compared to the other categories is due to an IDEA regulation. This regulation allows for the wide definition of the disability and the time allowed for a student to remain in this category before a more specific identification is required.

Table 2. Number of Children Ages 3-5 (not yet kindergarten) Receiving Services by Area of Disability on 2022 Child Count

Primary Disability	Age 3 Number (%)	Age 4 Number (%)	Age 5 (not yet kindergarten) Number (%)
Autism Spectrum Disorder	559 (21.56%)	631 (18.53%)	118 (18.18%)
Deaf-Blindness	*	*	*
Developmental Delay	1,141 (44.00%)	1,384 (40.65%)	260 (40.06%)
Hearing Impairment	24 (0.93%)	37 (1.09%)	*
Intellectual Disability	*	*	*
Multiple Disabilities	24 (0.93%)	37 (1.09%)	*
Orthopedic Impairment	*	13 (0.38%)	*
Other Health Impairment	51 (1.97%)	50 (1.47%)	16 (2.47%)
Specific Learning Disability	*	*	*
Speech or Language Impairment	774 (29.85%)	1,227 (36.04%)	237 (36.52%)
Traumatic Brain Injury	*	*	*
Visual Impairment	*	17 (0.50%)	*

Note: Source of data is IDEA, Part B, Section 618, 2022 Child Count.

Cells containing less than ten students are suppressed for confidentiality purposes and are denoted with an asterisk. Per the data, Developmental Delay, Speech or Language Impairment, and Autism Spectrum Disorder continue to be the categories with the highest numbers.

Educational Environment

The educational environment in which students with disabilities are served in South Carolina includes eight settings. All LEAs must ensure that preschool children with disabilities are educated in the least restrictive environment, regardless of whether the LEA operates public preschool programs for children without disabilities. To accomplish this, an LEA may provide services to a preschool child with a disability in a variety of settings which includes a regular kindergarten class, public or private preschool program, community-based child care facility, or in the child’s home. A child may attend at least 10 hours per week or less than 10 hours per week. Should a LEA not have a public preschool program, other alternative programming must be explored to ensure preschool children with disabilities are placed in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE).

LEAs should consider the following:

- providing services in preschool programs offered by other public agencies,
- enrolling children in private preschool programs for children without disabilities,

- locating classes for preschool children with disabilities in regular elementary schools,
- providing home-based services.

A memorandum ([Educational Environment](#)) was shared with LEAs in September 2019 to describe the continuum of service delivery environments in the early childhood sectors so that children with disabilities are supported appropriately in the LRE. Additional information may be found in the [Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs](#).

The table below denotes the numbers of three, four, and five-year-old's (not yet kindergarten) in each setting for the 2022–23 school year:

Table 3. Children Ages 3–5 (not yet kindergarten) Educational Environments

Least Restrictive Environment	Age 3 Number (%)	Age 4 Number (%)	Age 5 (not yet kindergarten) Number (%)
Home	33 (1.27%)	31 (0.91%)	*
In Regular Education at Least 10 hours per week – EC Program	140 (5.40%)	786 (23.08%)	168 (25.89%)
In Regular Education at Least 10 hours per week – Other Location	335 (12.92%)	442 (12.98%)	102 (15.72%)
In Regular Education less than 10 hours per week – EC Program	280 (10.80%)	627 (18.41%)	138 (21.26%)
In Regular Education less than 10 hours per week – Other Location	214 (8.25%)	239 (7.02%)	46 (7.09%)
Separate Class	1,075 (41.46%)	849 (24.93%)	138 (21.26%)
Separate School	52 (2.01%)	52 (1.53%)	*
Service Provider Location	464 (17.89%)	379 (11.13%)	45 (6.93%)

Note: Source of data is IDEA, Part B, Section 618, 2022 Child Count.

Cells containing less than ten students are suppressed for confidentiality purposes and are denoted with an asterisk. Of all preschool children receiving special education services, the three largest disability categories are Autism Spectrum Disorder, Developmental Delay and Speech-Language Impairment, representing 95.25 percent of preschool-aged children served in South Carolina. Children with these top three primary disabilities are served in various educational

environments across the state. Table 4 shows the top preschool diagnoses by educational environment.

Table 4. Top Preschool Diagnoses by Educational Environment for 2022–23

Educational Environment	Autism <i>Number (%)</i>	Developmental Delay <i>Number (%)</i>	Speech-Language Impairment <i>Number (%)</i>
Ages 3–5: Home	*	*	46 (2.06%)
Ages 3–5: In Regular Education at least 10 hours per week – EC Program	125 (9.56%)	510 (18.31%)	426 (19.03%)
Ages 3–5: In Regular Education at least 10 hours per week – Other Location	94 (7.19%)	247 (8.87%)	519 (23.19%)
Ages 3–5: In Regular Education less than 10 Hours per week – EC Program	207 (15.83%)	500 (17.95%)	287 (12.82%)
Ages 3–5: In Regular Education less than 10 Hours per week – Other Location	168 (12.84%)	200 (7.18%)	99 (4.42%)
Ages 3–5: Separate Class	682 (52.14%)	1,233 (44.27%)	17 (0.76%)
Ages 3–5: Separate School	22 (1.68%)	35 (1.26%)	24 (1.07%)
Ages 3-5: Service Provider Location	*	51 (1.83%)	820 (36.64%)

Note: Source of Data is IDEA, Part B, Section 618, Table 1 (Child Count), 2022 Child Count

Cells containing less than ten students are suppressed for confidentiality purposes and are denoted with an asterisk. A significant number of children with autism and developmental delay continue to be served in separate classes.

Section II: Financial Information

During the 2022–23 school year, the federal funds specifically allocated for preschool children with disabilities was \$7,859,585 which was a decrease from the 2021–22 allocation of \$11,067,150.00 (IDEA Preschool and ARP Preschool). The decrease was due to one-time Recovery Act Funds not available in 2022-23. State funds generated by preschool children with disabilities for 2022-23 totaled \$33,420,034.51. The total State funds generated for 2021–22 was \$19,801,948.09. Due to the implementation of a new state funding system on July 1, 2022, these figures cannot be accurately compared.

Federal Funds

For the 2022–23 school year, the OSES received \$7,859,585 in funds under the IDEA federal preschool grant program which represents a decrease of \$3,695,636 from the previous year. In 2021-22, Federal ARP funds in the amount \$3,636,719 were received for preschool. ARP funds were one-time funds issued to address the global pandemic.

Federal regulations allow the SCDE to retain a portion of the funds for administrative costs; in 2022-23 the agency elected to flow through \$7,183,070 (93.5 percent) of these funds to LEAs for the provision of direct services to preschool age children.

State Funds

Funds are now appropriated through the State Aid to Classrooms program which represents the State’s contribution to the Aid for instruction of students. LEAs receive funds based on the number of weighted pupil units and the State Aid to Classrooms represents the state share of the total Aid to Classrooms program, which is 75 percent. LEAs receive a proportionate share of the total cost of the State Aid to Classroom program. The weightings also changed for all SPED categories to 2.60.

South Carolina’s funding system under the Education Finance Act (EFA) and the State Aid to Classrooms (SAC) formula implemented in SFY 23 have been based on weighted pupil units generated primarily by “school-age” children. The exception is that 4-year-old vision and hearing-impaired students are included in this formula.

Because of the 2020 changes made to the pre-school LRE reporting in the annual Child Count, this report includes only those students who are not yet kindergarten-age, but most funding is generated by five-year-olds in kindergarten. Therefore, no per pupil amounts can be calculated using this information.

Fiscal Monitoring

The IDEA requires that the SCDE monitor LEAs regularly to ensure fiscal compliance with state and federal laws, rules, and regulations that govern the provision of special education and related services to appropriately identified children. The purpose of this monitoring is to focus federal, state, and local resources on improved results for children with disabilities and their families.

The OSES is responsible for conducting IDEA fiscal monitoring activities. The goal of the OSES’s Fiscal Monitoring is to ensure that LEAs are meeting the requirements of federal, state and IDEA regulations. The OSES’s fiscal monitoring approach is outcome oriented. However, if noncompliance is identified through any of the OSES’s monitoring activities, the OSES will require the LEA to correct the noncompliance as soon as possible, but in no case later than one year after the identification of the noncompliance.

Contrary to the perception that monitoring is an annual on-site process, the OSES employs several monitoring activities to ensure compliance with federal and local regulations and improve educational results and functional outcomes for students with disabilities. Monitoring activities include grants accounting processing system (GAPS) reviews, Maintenance of Effort

calculator review, on-site fiscal monitoring, virtual fiscal monitoring, desk audits, LEA self-assessments, grant applications, and audit findings reviews.

The OSES has an established risk-based tiered fiscal monitoring protocol where LEA fiscal processes, policies, procedures, budgets, and expenditures are reviewed. The fiscal monitoring process includes three tiers with increasing scrutiny of processes and documentation through the tier progression. A risk assessment rubric has been established to make determinations as to progression from Tier 1 to Tier 2 and from Tier 2 to Tier 3. Scores will be assigned for all monitoring components. Data is collected during the early fall for Tier 1; and Tier 2 monitoring begins in the late fall. The Tier 3 monitoring process begins in January.

Section III: Office of Special Education Services Initiatives and Partnerships

Data Collection and Reporting

To ensure valid and reliable data, the OSES staff worked actively with school and preschool staff to ensure data on Preschool LRE, Childhood Outcomes, and Early Childhood Transition were captured and reported appropriately. All LEAs and state-operated programs were provided with materials, training and technical assistance and guidance from the OSES to appropriately collect data on the preschool indicators. Additionally, the data team at the OSES completed checks of the data before they were made public. The OSES staff are available to provide support as data is both collected and reported by the LEA.

The OSES staff has created an Early Childhood Guide to offer additional information regarding each of the preschool indicators. The goal is for this guide to be released during the 2023–24 school year. The OSES 619 Coordinator has also worked closely with the Part C Director to provide training to LEAs, parents and students in higher education regarding Part C to Part B transition. The OSES has also worked with ECTA and DaSY (national early childhood technical assistance centers) to create a course on Childhood Outcomes that is now available in the state’s learning management system. This course was ready for implementation in Fall 2023.

South Carolina Partnerships for Inclusion (SCPI)

South Carolina Partnerships for Inclusion is the early childhood technical assistance provider through the OSES. As part of the newly formed technical assistance network, SC TEAMS, SCPI supports OSES to increase the local capacity of LEAs and schools to improve outcomes for children ages three through twenty-one with disabilities in South Carolina. Specifically, SCPI’s mission is to increase inclusive opportunities and school readiness for preschool children with disabilities to lead to more positive outcomes for children and families. SCPI’s goal is for LEAs to be better positioned to increase access to the general education curriculum for preschool children with disabilities.

Together, the OSES and the University of South Carolina implement the SCPI initiative. SCPI’s current five-year contract cycle began on October 1, 2021. With this new contract came a significant expansion of SCPI’s program and services, including incorporating various supports for Pyramid Model Implementation into the assistance SCPI provides (Pyramid PIECES). In 2022-23, four new members were added to the team.

Regarding tiered, targeted, and intensive support, SCPI had the opportunity to provide tiered assistance to six LEAs in the 2022–23 school year.

In addition to tiered support, SCPI also offered universal support to all LEAs which included professional development opportunities and resource sharing. A virtual community of practice regarding barriers to inclusion included 16 active participants from LEAs, partner organizations, child care centers and five other agencies. In October 2022, SCPI hosted its 1st Annual Early Childhood Inclusion Conference. The conference was designed to support early childhood leadership teams in building program capacity to increase inclusive preschool practices. A total of 162 participants attended from 34 LEAs.

The Special Education Itinerant Teacher (SEIT) Academy is a virtual continuing education series designed to promote and support the implementation of a special education itinerant model as part of the continuum of services for preschool children with disabilities. This was originally supported by funding from the Preschool Development Grant (PDG), but in April 2023, OSES agreed to fund the continuation of the SEIT Academy as part of SCPI's scope of work. It is with this initiative that four new team members were added to support this program and the LEA's continued implementation of the itinerant model. The third cohort began in May 2023 and consisted of 21 participants across six school LEA teams.

As part of SCPI's scope of work, they promote the expansion of Pyramid Model implementation in South Carolina across the early childhood mixed delivery system through the work of Pyramid PIECES; Promoting Integrated Early Childhood Emotional and Social supports. Specifically, SCPI provides support for program-wide implementation in LEAs, and for LEAs to develop tier-3 policy infrastructure to prevent and appropriately respond to challenging behavior in early childhood classrooms. Four LEAs applied to be part of Cohort 1, and all were accepted as partners for the first implementation cohort.

Under the PDG, the Institutions of Higher Education Early Childhood Inclusion Consortium (IHE Inclusion Consortium) was developed. The goal of the IHE Inclusion Consortium is to provide training and technical assistance to Early Childhood and Early Childhood Special Education faculty at 2- and 4-year Institutions of Higher Education to infuse evidence-based practices into their programs of study to prepare pre-service teachers to promote the inclusion of preschool children with disabilities. Consortium members consist of 94 faculty across 18 institutions of higher education in South Carolina. The OSES awarded the IHE Inclusion Consortium funding to continue its activities as an initiative under the SCPI contract beginning in April of 2023. As an activity offered through SCPI, the IHE will host quarterly meetings with featured speakers to facilitate collaboration across institutions around topics relevant to EC inclusion, as well as the sharing of resources to strengthen the training of pre-service teachers in South Carolina. The team will also continue to explore opportunities that would support ongoing funding to systematically conduct a mixed methods study to support Pyramid Model implementation training for faculty participating in the IHE Inclusion Consortium. This consortium also plans to recruit and create a professional learning community to increase statewide implementation of the Pyramid Model in higher education courses.

Section IV: Programs/Services for Preschool Children with Disabilities – Information on Other Offices within the South Carolina Department of Education, Other State Agencies and Head Start Programs

The SCDE is required to work with other state agencies through partnerships and other collaborations to service the three through five-year-old population. Collaborating with partner state agencies creates a continuum of services that provide support, evaluation, education, and resources to the three through five-year-old population. By continuing to develop and offer a continuum of service delivery environments and services and programs, preschool children with disabilities have increased access and equity in programming as well as access to typically developing peers and preschool activities while also receiving appropriate specialized services to meet individualized goals. Ongoing collaborative work allows for the continuum of service delivery environments in early childhood years to maintain relevance in terms of need and quality in terms of services. The continuum of services also supports several priorities surrounding IDEA compliance and high-quality early childhood education including inclusion programming and a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS). Many agencies and departments work with OSES to support this continuum of services to the three through five-year-old population. Included below are individual agency reports.

BabyNet

The most recent Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (SCDHHS)/BabyNet and the SCDE was signed in December 2020. This MOA is a five-year agreement outlining the responsibilities for SCDHHS/BabyNet and the South Carolina Department of Education. The identification, location, and evaluation of each child eligible for services under Parts B and C of the IDEA as well as the timely exchange of information ensures a smooth transition for children and their families from Part C to Part B in accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

From July 1, 2022, through June 30, 2023, a total of 3,982 transition conferences were held in South Carolina. The following table shows the number of timely and untimely transition conferences held.

Table 5. Part C Transition Data

Point of Entry Office	Timely Transition Conferences <i>Number (%)</i>	Untimely Transition Conferences <i>Number (%)</i>	Total Number of Transition Conferences <i>Number</i>
Charleston	655 (93%)	52 (7%)	707
Anderson	303 (95%)	17 (5%)	320
Richland	823 (92%)	75 (8%)	898
Colleton	170 (94%)	11 (6%)	181
York	232 (89%)	28 (11%)	260
Horry	670 (94%)	46 (6%)	716
Spartanburg	849 (94%)	51 (6%)	900
Total	3,702 (95%)	280 (5%)	3,982

Head Start

Head Start programs are available to children ages birth through five from families whose household income is below 100 percent poverty or if the annual income is less than \$27,000 for a family of four. A recent federal allowance gives Head Start the ability to serve SNAP eligible children (below 130% of poverty) if all children in a service area are being served. These programs are made available at no cost to children. Head Start programs encourage school readiness for children ages three through five. The OSES works in partnership with Head Start to ensure Child Find responsibilities are fulfilled and to ensure that children who qualify for services under Part B of the IDEA are served in their least restrictive environment. Federal guidelines require at least 10% of Head Start's service population to be comprised of students with an identified category of disability under the IDEA.

In 2022, there were a total of 43 Head Start programs in South Carolina. The table below has the number of programs state-wide by type.

Table 6. Number of Head Start Programs State-Wide by Type

Type of Program	Number
Head Start	16
Early Head Start	24
Migrant and Seasonal Head Start	1
Migrant and Seasonal Early Head Start	0
AIAN Head Start	1
AIAN Early Head Start	1

A total of 867 children were referred in 2022 for an evaluation to determine eligibility under the IDEA. Out of those 867 referrals, a total of 631 children received an evaluation and 473 met eligibility criteria under the IDEA.

First Steps

South Carolina First Steps 4K is a comprehensive, results-oriented initiative for improving early childhood development. First Steps 4K partners with high-quality private for-profit, private non-profit, faith-based, and other eligible providers to expand four-year-old kindergarten programs through South Carolina's Child Early Reading and Education Program (CERDEP). Programs focus on the developmental and learning supports that children must have to be ready for school. These programs incorporate research-based practices, ongoing assessment, and parenting education.

Demographics

A total of 104 four-year-old children with disabilities were served in First Steps facilities during the 2022–23 school year. The table below has the number of preschool children served by ethnicity.

Table 7. Number of Preschool Children Served by Ethnicity

	American Indian or Alaskan	Asian	Black or African American	Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	Two or more races	White
Age 4	2	2	50	1	21	28

Finances

Tuition for children participating in First Steps 4K is covered by CERDEP state funding. The amount of funds expended for 2022–23 was \$643,591.80.

Agency Information

South Carolina First Steps 4K Guidelines are published [here](#).

South Carolina Commission for the Blind (SCCB)

The Children’s Services program at SCCB serves legally blind children, between the ages of 3-12. (This includes preschool age range of ages three–five.) Children’s Services counselors provide direct assistance to eligible consumers with adjustment to blindness and vision loss and may also coordinate a variety of other necessary community resources. To be eligible for the Children’s Services program, applicants must meet the definition of legal blindness, or have a progressive visual condition that may lead to blindness within 24 months.

Legal Blindness means a person has:

- A visual acuity of 20/200 in the better eye, with correction, Or
- A visual field of 20 degrees or less

Children’s Services coordinates with community-based early intervention programs to assist families with obtaining services from professionals with specialized training in visual impairments as well as infant, toddler, and child development.

Children’s Services counselors coordinate with several agencies and organizations to ensure all issues are appropriately addressed. Some of those referral sources include, but are not limited to, eye care professionals, the SC Department of Social Services, the SC Department of Health and Environmental Control, the SC Department of Disabilities and Special Needs, the SC School for the Deaf and Blind, National Federation of the Blind’s Successful Transitions program, Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired South Carolina, and Vision Instructors.

Counselors work with their consumers and conduct thorough assessments to identify their strengths and specific needs. Counselors work with families to receive their input as part of the process of identifying goals and services to be provided. Once the assessment is completed, that information is utilized to create an Individualized Service Plan (ISP) for the consumer. These plans are individualized based on the needs of the individual and can be amended, as needed, and reviewed annually.

Services for children who are blind, or visually impaired, may include:

- counseling and guidance for parents,

- low vision and/or assistive technology assessments (recommended equipment and devices are also provided),
- orientation and mobility training,
- workshops and support groups for families,
- reinforcement of the development of independent living skills,
- consultation and coordination with community resources.

Initiatives During 2022–23 School Year Included:

- Provided early intervention assistance, guidance for families, and necessary learning tools to promote the appropriate adjustment skills development.
- Gave information for parents regarding beneficial community resources and promoted parental involvement in their child’s development and educational plans.
- Encouraged coordination among programs to address various needs and assist the children with achieving established goals.
- Worked with other community agencies to provide orientation and mobility to preschool age children.
- Participated in conference meetings, community activities, and public awareness events to promote the Children’s Services Program.
- Maintained contact and interaction with appropriate referral sources such as eye care professionals, other school districts, community businesses, and families.

Demographics

SCCB served 3 preschool-age children during the 2022–23 school year. The tables below illustrate the number of children served in each age group as well as the breakdown by ethnicity.

Table 8. Number of Preschool Children with Disabilities Served by Age Group

	Total
Age 3	1
Age 4	1
Age 5 (not yet kindergarten)	1
Total	3

Table 9. Number of Preschool Children with Disabilities Served by Ethnicity

	American Indian or Alaskan	Asian	Black of African American	Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	Two or More Races	White
Age 3	0	0	0	0	0	1
Age 4	0	0	0	0	0	1
Age 5	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	0	0	0	0	0	3

Finances

The total funds expended on children ages 3-5 were \$1,348.06. Program expenditures for the preschool children assisted was an average of \$449.35 per child during the past fiscal year. This amount may vary among cases, due to the child's needs being individualized. State funds are appropriated for the SCCB Children's Services Program.

Agency Information

The guidelines for Children's Services are outlined in the Policies and Procedures Manual. The information includes services provided to eligible consumers, as well as each counselor's responsibilities to the consumers served. The Program's services are also highlighted in agency literature and on the agency's [website](#).

South Carolina Department of Disabilities and Special Needs (DDSN)

DDSN provides Early Intervention services to children ages three through five. Early Intervention is a family-focused, natural environment-based service for children who experience disabilities or delays in their development. Regardless of age, all children are assigned an Early Interventionist (EI). The EI helps families understand their child's development and provides training to the parents/caregivers on ways that they can address their child's development in their daily routines. The EI also provides service coordination activities on behalf of the child/family. All services are provided according to the child's individualized plan. The child's EI is responsible for linking families to these resources and making referrals for other needed services, as appropriate.

Initiatives During 2022–23 School Year Included:

- Children were evaluated for DDSN eligibility through our Intake/Eligibility Division. Evaluation may include psychological and autism spectrum disorder testing.
- Once eligibility was determined, families were able to receive family training and service coordination from qualified providers.
- DDSN and our network of providers continue to support families during the National Public Health Emergency offering services via telehealth as warranted.
- Families received family support funds, summer support funds, and respite. Note: Eligibility criteria applied.
- DDSN administered three waivers Intellectual Disability/Related Disability Waiver, Community Supports Waiver, and the Head and Spinal Cord Injury Waiver. Parents of children, ages three through five, were given the opportunity to apply for waivers at the Intake/Eligibility process and through their Early Intervention provider. Note: Eligibility criteria applied.
- DDSN identified children eligible to receive services from the American Printing House for the Blind and assisted in the application process.
- DDSN staff provided training to law enforcement agencies, medical professionals social workers and conference attendees regarding autism spectrum disorder.
- DDSN provided technical assistance and training to Early Intervention providers regarding DDSN standards and 'best practices.'

Demographics

DDSN served 6,683 preschool-age children during the 2022–23 school year. The table below illustrates the number of children served in each age group.

Table 10. Number of Preschool Children with Disabilities Served by Age Group

	Total
Age 3	4,860
Age 4	3,140
Age 5 (not yet kindergarten)	1,824
Total	6,683

Finances

DDSN is financially responsible for providing Family Training/Special Instruction and Service Coordination. DDSN uses a combination of Medicaid funding and state funding to pay for services. The following table gives information regarding funding information for children ages three through five served in Early Intervention.

Table 11. Funds Expended on Children Ages 3-5 Served in Early Intervention

Fund Type	Amount
State Funds	\$2,531,172.06
Medicaid Funds	\$11,593,721.36
Total	\$14,124,893.42

Agency Information

Information about DDSN’s programs for children ages 3 through 5 can be found on the website: <https://ddsn.sc.gov>

South Carolina Department of Social Services (SCDSS)

The SCDSS Division of Early Care and Education offers the following programs and services for preschool children ages three to five.

The SCDSS Division of Early Care and Education provides childcare scholarships as financial assistance to eligible families so parents can work. Special Needs childcare scholarships help to provide childcare for eligible families of children from birth to age 19 who have a documented disability or special need.

The South Carolina Child Care Inclusion Collaborative (Inclusion Collaborative) provides individualized training, coaching, and consultation for childcare providers to support the inclusion of children with disabilities/developmental delays in childcare programs. The Inclusion Specialists collaborate directly with childcare staff and program administrators to increase the use of evidence-based practices that lead to access and meaningful participation for all children. This includes providing training and coaching on evidence-based practices related to the

promotion of social and emotional wellbeing and prevention of challenging behaviors using the Pyramid Model framework.

Through active collaboration with partnering agencies and organizations, the Inclusion Collaborative helps childcare providers stay connected with resources and opportunities to increase the quality of care and education provided to children and families in South Carolina. The South Carolina Department of Social Services Division of Early Care and Education supports this program using the federal Child Care Development Fund.

Initiatives during the 2022-23 School Year Included:

- Child Care Scholarships: Provided childcare financial assistance for eligible families of children from birth to age nineteen who had a documented disability or special need.
- Developmental Screening: The Inclusion Collaborative provided training and coaching to childcare programs to conduct developmental screening (i.e., Ages and Stages Questionnaires – Third Edition), communicated with parents about results, and made appropriate referrals.
- CARA’s Kit: The Inclusion Collaborative provided intensive training and coaching related to making adaptations and modifications using CARA’s Kit framework.

Mix EC: Multi-Systems Inclusion Expansion in Early Childhood (Preschool Development Grant 0-5 funding) is another group of multiple initiatives supported by the SCDSS Division of Early Care and Education. These initiatives support the inclusion of young children with disabilities into community-based programs.

Initiatives during the 2022-2023 School Year Included:

- Pyramid Model supports:
 - Program-wide Pyramid Model Implementation in Childcare: This provided program coach support for childcare programs to implement the use of Pyramid Model practices and strategies in their programs.
 - Behavior Support Network in Childcare: This initiative supported childcare programs to implement Tier 3 behavior interventions for children with challenging behavior.
- Child Care Ready for All (CRAWl): Provided nurse consultation for childcare providers to support children with chronic health conditions.

In addition, SCDSS is working with the SC Inclusion Collaborative, SC Partnerships for Inclusion, OSES, and Able SC to provide contracted slots in childcare programs for three-year-old children with disabilities to assist LEA’s to expand their continuum of supports to included inclusive placements for preschool children. This initiative was in the early stages of development during the 2022-23 school year.

Demographics

SCDSS Division of Early Care and Education served a total of 176 preschool children during the 2022-23 school year. The tables below illustrate the number of children served in each age group as well as the breakdown by ethnicity.

Table 12. Number of Preschool Children with Disabilities Served by Age Group

	Total
Age 3	66
Age 4	95
Age 5 (not yet kindergarten)	15
Total	176

Table 13. Number of Preschool Children with Disabilities Served by Ethnicity

	American Indian or Alaskan	Asian	Black of African American	Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	Two or More Races	White
Age 3	0	0	43	0	8	15
Age 4	0	0	61	0	11	23
Age 5	0	0	10	0	2	3
Total	0	0	114	0	21	41

Finances

The SCDSS Division of Early Care and Education is financially responsible for providing the South Carolina Voucher Program with Special Needs Vouchers for eligible families of children from birth to age nineteen who have a documented disability or special need. The following table gives information regarding expenditures for 9/1/2022-5/31/2023 by age group.

Table 14. Funds Expended by Age Group

	Amount of Funds Expended
Age 3	\$260,603.00
Age 4	\$324,490.00
Age 5 (not yet kindergarten)	\$32,952.00
Total	\$618,045.00

Agency Information

Additional information regarding the South Carolina Voucher Program may be found on the SCDHHS Division of Early Care and Education’s [website](#). Information regarding the South Carolina Child Care Inclusion Collaborative may be found on their [website](#).

South Carolina School for the Deaf and the Blind (SCSDB)

The SCSDB provides a comprehensive preschool special education day (ages three through five) and residential (ages four through five) program for students identified as deaf/hard of hearing and/or blind/visually impaired. Staples of the preschool program include communication support via American Sign Language, current technology including FM systems, sound fields, low vision aids and Braille resources, extensive related services including Orientation and Mobility, audiology services, and Occupational/Physical Therapy, and low teacher to student ratios. Students go through an application process to attend SCSDB. The school serves students on

campus who can come from the entire state of South Carolina. Currently, all preschool students are day students; none are residential students.

Initiatives During the 2022–23 School Year Included:

- Increased parental involvement through technology,
- Continued focus on emergent literacy skills, and
- Expanded core curriculum for Vision Impaired and Deaf and Hard of Hearing students.

Demographics

For 2022–23, five children in the three through five-year-old (not yet kindergarten) category of students were served. The tables below show how many children were in each age group and information about ethnicity.

Table 15. Number of Preschool Children with Disabilities Served by Age Group

	Total	Number Served by LEA
Age 3	0	0
Age 4	4	4
Age 5 (not yet kindergarten)	1	1
Total	5	5

Table 16. Number of Preschool Children Served by Ethnicity

	American Indian or Alaskan	Asian	Black or African American	Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	Two or more races	White
Age 3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Age 4	0	0	0	0	0	4
Age 5 (not yet kindergarten)	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	0	0	0	0	0	5

Finances

The SCSDB is financially responsible for providing the following programs and services for preschool students identified as deaf/hard of hearing and/or blind/visually impaired:

- Full day preschool special education program (3-year-olds; day students only and 4 through 5-year-olds; day and residential students),
- Audiology services,
- Occupational Therapy,
- Physical Therapy,
- Orientation and Mobility,
- Speech-Language Therapy,
- Nursing Services, and
- Transportation.

Program expenditures are not delineated between preschool and school-age populations. Funding sources include state appropriations and IDEA funds.

Agency Information

The agency [website](#) includes additional information regarding program policies, procedures, and services.

Initiatives within the South Carolina Department of Education Office of Early Learning and Literacy (OELL)

Child Early Reading Development and Education Program (CERDEP)

The CERDEP offers many of the state's at-risk four-year-olds the opportunity to attend a full-day education program. CERDEP began as the Child Development Education Pilot Program (CDEPP) in 2006–07 as a pilot program for children residing in the plaintiff LEAs in the school funding lawsuit Abbeville County School District et al. vs. South Carolina. On June 11, 2014, Governor Nikki Haley signed into law Act 284 (Read to Succeed). Section 2 of that act codified the Child Development Education Program, now CERDEP, for all LEAs with a poverty index of 60 percent or higher. As of the 2021–22 school year, all LEAs are eligible to opt into CERDEP for income-eligible children in high poverty schools.

The CERDEP program is designed to serve 4-year-old children whose families have an annual income of 185 percent or less of the federal poverty guidelines or are Medicaid eligible. Students participate in a full-day, 180-day instructional program to prepare them to enter kindergarten ready to learn and are served for a minimum of six and a half hours a day, five days a week. CERDEP classrooms provide students with the developmental and learning support necessary for later success in school. CERDEP teachers must be certified in early childhood education and participate annually in professional development on instructional strategies in areas such as literacy, math, and social-emotional development. Additionally, all CERDEP programs must offer parenting education programs with an emphasis on literacy and math. The OELL office annually revises the CERDEP Program Guidelines for participating schools and LEAs. These guidelines may be found on the SCDE's website.

Over the past decade, the South Carolina General Assembly has expanded CERDEP funding to provide greater Pre-K access to students in poverty. Due to continued expansion into new schools, CERDEP enrollment has again increased statewide. LEAs added 71 classrooms in 2022-23. As of March 2023, approximately 13,600 students were enrolled in CERDEP. The SCDE expects enrollment to increase in 2022–23. Approximately 81 new classrooms are expected to be added for the 2022–23 school year.

CERDEP LEAs are required to administer one of three approved assessments: Individual Growth and Development Indicators (myIGDIs), Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS-Pre-K), or Teaching Strategies GOLD (GOLD). Students are assessed within the first 45 days of school and again during the final 45 days of school.

CERDEP Partnerships

Regional Education Laboratory (REL) Southeast Partner Work

The OELL partnered with the REL Southeast on multiple literacy initiatives during the last two cycles. During cycle one, the OELL assisted REL Southeast and five partner states to create a resource guide entitled [Professional Learning Community: Emergent Literacy](#). This guide was developed for preschool teachers, who in collaborative learning experiences apply evidence-based strategies in their instruction. Through this collaborative learning experience, preschool teachers expand their knowledge base as they read, discuss, share, and apply evidence-based key ideas and strategies that increase student outcomes as it relates to school readiness.

In 2021–22, the OELL began a five-year research partnership with REL on the implementation of a PLC model for 4K educators. For the first year of the partnership, the OELL secured demonstration sites in two high-poverty CERDEP LEAs. This school year, the OELL and the REL began implementation of the Professional Learning Community (PLC) model with the demonstration sites and began the recruitment process for the 2023–24 study that will be presented to the Institute of Education Sciences (IES). For more information on the PLC partnership and research, please visit [REL’s overview of the project](#).

Early Childhood Education (ECE Collaborative)

The OELL is a member of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) Early Childhood Education (ECE) Collaborative. The ECE Collaborative is focused on ensuring students have access to high-quality, developmentally appropriate early childhood education to prepare them for 4K, elementary school, and beyond. The ECE Collaborative is the only forum in the nation for early learning leaders at state education agencies to collaborate, sharpen their skills, and expand their knowledge on early childhood education policy and practice. The Team Lead for Early Learning, Wendy Burgess, currently serves on the ECE Collaborative Planning Committee.

BUILD

The BUILD Initiative supports states as they build early childhood systems across the many child- and family-serving sectors. The BUILD Initiative envisions a time when all children reach their full potential; race, place, and income are no longer predictors of outcomes. BUILD aims for optimal child development and family well-being by partnering with and developing teams of state leaders who share those aims and understand the relationship between research and best practice related to early childhood science and equitable systems change. It is this focus on cross-sector leadership and equitable systems-building for early childhood that makes BUILD unique. BUILD partners with early childhood leaders focused on family support and engagement, early care and education, health, mental health, nutrition, child welfare, and housing to create the policies and infrastructure necessary for quality and tailored design to increase access and to ensure equity.

South Carolina’s BUILD State Leadership Team currently consists of representatives from the state’s Departments of Social Services, Mental Health, Health and Environmental Control, Education, Health and Human Services; SC Thrive; SC First Steps; and the University of South Carolina. In addition to serving on the state BUILD Leadership Team, Wendy Burgess, the Early

Learning team lead serves on the BUILD State Partner Meeting Advisory Team. This team plans the agenda and work session for the state level meetings.

Initiatives for 2022–23 through the Office of Early Learning and Literacy Specific to CERDEP/4K Included:

- Supported CERDEP programs in maintaining high-quality instruction.
- Created lesson plans and interactive lessons for grades 4K–3 that are loaded into the instructional hub.
- Supported CERDEP expansion of classrooms, extended day, extended year, and/or summer programs.
- Maintained early learning specialist team to now include seven full-time employees (FTEs) who focus on classroom monitoring and providing training.
- Continued the work of five learning engagement coaches for families and one learning engagement coach for teachers.
- Continued the support of the South Carolina Early Learning Standards (SC-ELS) timeline through the distribution of SC-ELS materials.
- Provided face-to-face learning opportunities at regional, LEA, and school levels on various topics such as the SC-ELS, creating literacy rich environments, promoting literacy in math instruction, supporting writing and book making, and providing early learning leader support.
- Supported social-emotional framework by collaborating with the state level Pyramid Implementation team.
- Promoted improvements in the South Carolina birth to school connections by serving on the BUILD Initiative leadership team and task force and serving on the Preschool Development Grant (PDG) leadership team.
- Collaborated on the Birth thru Five Strategic Plan as part of the Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC).
- Continued the Waterford UPSTART program pilot in 20 CERDEP LEAs.
- Collaborated with other members of the ECAC on the state’s fourth and fifth Palmetto Pre-K Jamboree.
- Collaborated with key early learning stakeholders on the First 5 and Palmetto Pre-K webpages to expand access and information to families statewide.
- Hosted regional family sessions to address early learning and literacy needs of South Carolina’s youngest learners and disadvantaged learners.
- Hosted instructional hub training regionally and at the LEA and school levels.
- Supported private centers and Head Starts by providing free sessions at various early learning symposiums and conferences across the state.
- Served on the SCDE Family Engagement leadership team to build out local family engagement sessions and statewide Family and Community Engagement Summit.

- Partnered with Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Southeast to create the Emerging Literacy Professional Learning Community (PLC) modules, implemented demonstration sites phase, and began recruitment for study that will grow teachers' knowledge in emerging literacy; Served on the REL Governing Board.
- Generated and vetted family transition resources disseminated across the state for 4K registration process.
- Updated approved CERDEP curriculum list and held a statewide showcase; and
- Connected schools to Countdown to Kindergarten opportunities and assisted in the planning of Countdown to Kindergarten celebrations.

OELL (CERDEP) and OSES Partnerships

Education Commission of the States Technical Assistance Opportunity: Improving Pre-K to Kindergarten Transitions

South Carolina is participating in a multistate, collaborative learning cohort with technical assistance to support students' successful transition from Pre-K to kindergarten during the unique COVID-19 era and beyond. Both the OSES and the OELL within the SCDE are participating in this initiative. Implementing effective transitions for students from Pre-K (i.e., Head Start, state Pre-K, center- and home-based Pre-K and child care) to kindergarten has always required system coordination and approaches to policy and funding. It is particularly critical that policy supporting student transitions is intentional in ensuring equitable outcomes. To address these challenges and advance equitable outcomes in the current environment, state policymakers need actionable information and support.

- Activity #1: Assist South Carolina by identifying, obtaining, analyzing, and reporting on the federal and state laws and/or policies, procedures, and practices of South Carolina's early childhood programs as it relates specifically to Family Engagement and/or a program's obligations to Families related to children's Pre-K to K Transition.
- Activity #2: Assist South Carolina by identifying, obtaining, analyzing, and reporting on state specific documents, plans and information related to Family Engagement and/or Families on the Transition of children from Pre-K to K.
- Activity #3: Provide support to South Carolina by facilitating or participating in one or more virtual opportunities with South Carolina administrators responsible for various federal and state-funded early childhood programs to review the information collected.
- Activity #4: Support South Carolina's efforts aimed at Family Engagement by identifying, obtaining, and providing resources and resource/PLO opportunities related to Families and/or Family Engagement as it relates to Pre-K to K Transitions.
- Activity #5 (Conditional): Support South Carolina by assisting in the identification of the top ten questions that a family would ask of the various federal and state funded early childhood programs in the system.

To support kindergarten readiness efforts in SC at the state level, the Palmetto Pre-K Transitions Workgroup developed a Pre-K to K Transition plan. This plan evaluates available policies and CERDEP Unexpended Funds April 1, 2023, Page 17 programmatic guidelines and state and

federal levels and includes a set of joint tactics to advance the transition from the mixed-delivery early childhood system to kindergarten and the K-12 system. The benefits of a smooth transition of children and families into kindergarten underpin the success of children in school settings and foster a positive learning environment and relationship between families and schools. Many parents are unsure of the best activities to prepare their child, or the logistics and expectations of their child and family once their child enrolls in kindergarten. The tactics and best practices that are identified and recommended in this plan are aligned with the goals and strategies contained in For Our Future: South Carolina’s Birth through Five Plan. Click [here](#) to view the state’s transition plan.

Early Childhood Advisory Council

The ECAC is a council comprised of SC early childhood agencies. The ECAC is responsible for the Preschool Development Grant (PDG) Birth through Five strategic planning process and South Carolina’s Birth through Five Strategic Plan. SCDE Superintendent Ellen Weaver serves as the chairman of the ECAC. The vision for this work is: “We will be successful when all children reach their highest potential.” The agencies worked together to secure a second year of funding for the PDG. With funds from the PDG, the Palmetto Pre-K leadership team has joined efforts to determine the needs of South Carolina’s youngest learners and their families. The Birth through Five plan focuses on addressing the needs of SC’s most vulnerable children and families. The plan includes marketing and advertising on transitions from 4K to 5K (see the Palmetto Pre-K site). The plan also includes a cross-agency approach to supporting families via the First Five website.

First Five SC transforms the way families access publicly funded early childhood programs and services in South Carolina. Through a single, online portal, families and their advocates can find information about child care, health, early intervention, nutrition, and parenting support programs in their area. A single online application makes it easy to apply for multiple programs in just a few minutes. First Five SC engages parents and caregivers as active partners in making South Carolina’s early childhood system work for young children and families. By streamlining the search and application process, First Five SC helps families better understand their options and choose the programs and services that best meet their needs. In FY23, working together with partner agencies across the early childhood system, the ECAC successfully developed and launched a common application for 27 of South Carolina’s publicly funded early childhood programs.

In March 2020, the state received federal grant funding to expand the current state longitudinal data system (SLDS) to include children in early childhood programs, including First Steps. The inclusion of early learners will improve the data available to policymakers and program coordinators and will align early childhood center data collection with K–12 school systems. Cross-agency work on this extension continued in 2022–23. The Office of Research and Data Analysis (ORDA) is currently leading the collaboration between early childhood agencies, the SCDE, and the Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office (RFA) to collect student identifiers to streamline data collection and sharing. This work falls under the scope of the Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS).

The ECIDS includes the following: (1) Palmetto Drive to Five (PDt5) initiative, a state and county-level data dashboard including disaggregated early childhood program data. Currently there are 11 agencies with a total of 15 programs participating to date and (2) Early Learning Extension (ELE), an integration of early learning data from entities, Head Start (22 grantees), First Steps (both 4K and Partnerships) and SC DSS Child Care Scholarships into the K-12 Statewide Longitudinal Data System. The ELE initiative also includes the establishment of a data governance framework for the ECIDS to manage all initiatives. This will include the establishment of a system-wide early childhood data request process by FY25.

More information about ECAC may be found on the [website](#).

Pyramid Model Partnership: Pyramid PIECES

Pyramid PIECES is a cross-sector organization that promotes Pyramid Model implementation across the early childhood landscape in South Carolina. Organizations involved in the State Leadership Team (SLT) are: the OSES, the OELL, South Carolina Infant Mental Health Association, Head Start, the University of South Carolina College of Education, South Carolina Child Care Inclusion Collaborative, The University of South Carolina Center for Disability Resources, Palmetto Pyramid Police Partnership, South Carolina Program for Infant/Toddler Care, Children’s Trust of South Carolina, Family Connection of South Carolina, PASOs, First Steps, ABC Quality, University of South Carolina Team for Early Childhood Solutions, BabyNet, and South Carolina Partnerships for Inclusion. As part of SCPI’s scope of work, they provide facilitation of the State Leadership Team (SLT) activities.

In July 2022, the first annual SLT retreat was held. Members completed the Benchmarks of Quality, developed shared language, and began action planning in response to identified critical elements. The SLT completed a PATH plan to identify the team’s five-year goals, vision for the next year, and the steps needed to make progress towards the vision and end goals. With the PATH plan complete, the SLT identified four key areas of need and established workgroups to address each. By taking the time to go through the PATH plan and develop intentional action items to build the use of Pyramid Model practices in our state, our State Leadership Team has created a strong, collaborative community that seeks to support every child and family in the early learning continuum.

The Pyramid PIECES website was developed in 2023 to raise awareness of the impact of the Pyramid Model and streamline communication across sectors. Pyramid Model [modules](#) are now available at no cost for anyone in the state.

Summary

The OSES continues to strive to provide high-level support and collaboration in a continuum for children ages three through five that emphasize access, equity, and quality education. The OSES and its partnering agencies have developed and implemented consistent and flexible means of reaching families of three through five-year-olds, supporting early childhood educators, and creating programming that endeavors to improve early childhood outcomes across South Carolina. It is imperative that preschool programs and educators continue to be supported to ensure that children are able to obtain the support they need from birth so that they may start preschool educational programs with the tools and support they need. Only through these

coordinated, early intervening efforts will children start school ready to learn, progress from grade to grade, and be equipped with the skills, information, and supports they need for kindergarten readiness and lifelong success.

Recommendations

Based on information in the annual report, we, the South Carolina Advisory Council on the Education of Students with Disabilities, make the following recommendations and plans for the 2023-24 school year.

The number of children qualifying with disabilities in both Part C and Part B continues to grow. The Council would like to further examine COVID-related impacts upon South Carolina's youngest learners.

The Council acknowledges concerns regarding suspension and expulsion of children ages birth through five from both child care and school settings. In an effort to decrease the children and families affected by suspension and expulsion, the Council recommends that the OSES continue to work to expand Pyramid Model practices to include both training and implementation in LEAs.

The Council also acknowledges that data indicates many preschool children with disabilities, especially three-year-old's, continue to be served in separate classrooms, away from non-disabled peers, which affects the social, communication, and academic skills of students with disabilities. The Council recommends that the OSES continue to provide support to LEAs as needed to provide a continuum of placements for preschool children with disabilities. When LEAs practice inclusion, it is expected that the state will see the impact of such changes throughout the child's school career, leading to increased graduation rates and post-school outcomes.

References

Individual with Disabilities Act (IDEA, U. S. Department of Education. Section 300.8, Child with a Disability.

Website: <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/a/300.8>