



**Report Summarizing Services Provided Under the
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to
Preschool Children with Disabilities
2023-24 School Year**

Provided to the Interagency Coordinating Council, the Senate Finance
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, 2025

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February 1, 2025

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The Preschool Committee of the Advisory Council for Educating Students with Disabilities (ACESD) is pleased to present its 2025 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 2025 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 joint Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Education originally issued in 2015 was updated in November 2023. This statement affirms that “all young children with disabilities should have access to high-quality inclusive early childhood programs that provide individualized and appropriate support so they can fully participate alongside their peers without disabilities, meet high expectations, and achieve their full potential.” Research indicates that inclusion is beneficial to both children with and without disabilities and inclusion in high-quality early childhood programs can support children in reaching their full potential.

The Preschool Committee of the Council 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 recommendations of the Preschool Committee of the ACESD include the following:

- The Preschool Committee of the Council will serve as the cross-sector Early Childhood Inclusion State Leadership Team. Per the joint policy statement, a recommendation was that each state should have a cross-sector leadership team to develop a shared vision and develop and implement a strategic plan to expand access to and participation in inclusive programs across sectors serving young children and their families. As part of this work, over the next year, the Preschool Committee of the Council proposes to do the following:
 - Ensure the leadership team includes a broad representation of agencies, programs and partners across the state.
 - Create a shared mission and vision.
 - Create common, universal language regarding the inclusion of young children with disabilities.
 - Research how many individual programs and agencies in the state are working in the early childhood sector and compile a list of supports and resources state-wide.
 - Support statewide implementation of high-quality evidence-based practices.
- The Preschool Committee of the Council also 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 2023-24 school year had an overall increase of 741 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

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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. Information collected includes pertinent program data, financial information, and 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 (OSSES) to provide a comprehensive system of service for preschool children with disabilities in the 2023–24 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 23, 2023, for the 2023–24 school year, 7,388 children with disabilities ages three through five (not yet kindergarten) received special education services in South Carolina:

- 2,757 three-year-old's,
- 3,921 four-year-old's, and
- 710 five-year-old's (not yet in kindergarten).

Of the total number of three through five-year-old's (not yet in kindergarten), 2,214 were female and 5,174 were males. 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.

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

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Age 3	2,209	1,586	2,150	2,593	2,757
Age 4	3,332	2,768	2,950	3,405	3,921
Age 5 (not yet kindergarten)	4,858	596*	662*	649*	710*
Total	10,399	4,950	5,762	6,647	7,388

Note: Source of data is IDEA, Part B, Section 618, 2023 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 2023 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:

- 0.40 percent American Indian,
- 1.69 percent Asian,
- 33.43 percent Black or African American,
- 10.47 percent Hispanic or Latino,
- * Percent Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander,
- 6.23 percent Two or more races, and
- 47.64 percent White.

Primary Disability

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

For 2023–24, the data below indicates the number of children identified in each category:

Table 2. Number of Children Ages 3-5 (not yet kindergarten) Receiving Services by Area of Disability on 2023 Child Count

Primary Disability	Age 3	Age 4	Age 5 (not yet kindergarten)
Autism Spectrum Disorder	658	859	143
Deaf-Blindness	*	*	*
Developmental Delay	1201	1576	264
Emotional Disability	*	*	*
Hearing Impairment	43	32	*
Intellectual Disability	*	*	*
Multiple Disabilities	19	32	*
Orthopedic Impairment	*	*	*
Other Health Impairment	45	74	20
Specific Learning Disability	*	*	*
Speech or Language Impairment	778	1323	258
Traumatic Brain Injury	*	*	*
Visual Impairment	*	*	*

Note: Source of data is IDEA, Part B, Section 618, 2023 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.

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.

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 early childhood 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.

It is required by IDEA that LEAs provide a continuum of service delivery environments in the early childhood sector 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](#). This joint statement was recently updated in November 2023 and reiterates the expectation for inclusion in high-quality early childhood programs as well as the recommendation for increasing inclusive early learning opportunities.

The following table denotes the numbers of three, four, and five-year-old's (not yet kindergarten) in each setting for the 2023–24 school year:

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

Least Restrictive Environment	Age 3	Age 4	Age 5 (not yet kindergarten)
Home	34	34	*
In Regular Education at Least 10 hours per week – EC Program	188	972	207
In Regular Education at Least 10 hours per week – Other Location	388	556	134
In Regular Education less than 10 hours per week – EC Program	333	601	113
In Regular Education less than 10 hours per week – Other Location	161	290	49
Separate Class	1,171	1,058	142
Separate School	32	41	10
Service Provider Location	450	369	54

Note: Source of data is IDEA, Part B, Section 618, 2023 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 95.56 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 2023–24

Educational Environment	Autism	Developmental Delay	Speech-Language Impairment
Ages 3–5: Home	*	*	48
Ages 3–5: In Regular Education at least 10 hours per week – EC Program	171	611	536
Ages 3–5: In Regular Education at least 10 hours per week – Other Location	137	274	644
Ages 3–5: In Regular Education less than 10 Hours per week – EC Program	244	508	250
Ages 3–5: In Regular Education less than 10 Hours per week – Other Location	212	189	73
Ages 3–5: Separate Class	859	1,361	12
Ages 3–5: Separate School	24	30	*
Ages 3-5: Service Provider Location	11	61	791

Note: Source of Data is IDEA, Part B, Section 618, Table 1 (Child Count), 2023 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.

Limited English Proficiency

Of the preschool age children, 6,605 children, or 89.40 percent do not have Limited English Proficiency, and 783 children or 10.59 percent do have Limited English Proficiency.

Section II: Financial Information

Federal Funds

For the 2023-24 school year, the OSES received \$7,859,585 in funds under the IDEA federal preschool. This was an increase of \$176,454 from the 2022-23 allocation.

Federal regulations allow the SCDE to retain a portion of the funds for administrative costs; in 2023-24, the agency elected to flow through \$7,311,880.47 (93%) 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 for all SPED categories are 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 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 619 Coordinator continued to collaborate 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 continued work with ECTA and DaSY (national early childhood technical assistance centers) on two initiatives:

- to support and increase participation in the Childhood Outcomes Summary course in the Learning Management System as well as the COS Knowledge Check.

- to consider how to restructure the state’s Early Childhood Performance Factor, which directly impacts LEA determinations.

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 state’s technical assistance network, SC TEAMS, SCPI supports OSES to increase the local capacity of districts 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.

Regarding tiered, targeted, and intensive support, SCPI had the opportunity to provide voluntary tiered technical assistance to twelve LEAs in the 2023–24 school year. Tier 2 Targeted Support was provided to six districts and six districts were supported with voluntary intensive technical assistance services.

In addition to tiered support, SCPI also offered universal support to all LEAs which included in-person and virtual professional development opportunities and resource sharing, as well as their annual Early Childhood Inclusion Conference. In October 2023, SCPI hosted its 2nd 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 278 participants attended from 28 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. The fourth cohort consisting of 31 participants across seven school district teams began in May 2024. This brings the total number of districts supported through the SEIT Academy to 22. The SEIT Coach was able to extend the learning and implementation from the SEIT Academy by providing evidence-based coaching and technical assistance to support the implementation of SEIT action plans developed by district teams as part of the Academy, and to build their capacity to implement an itinerant model.

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 who were part of the first cohort have moved from exploration and installation into the initial implementation phase. Part of SCPI's scope of work is to facilitate the State Leadership Team (SLT), a cross-sector organization. This team met 10 times over the course of this year.

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 hosts 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. In June 2024 a syllabus swap was held among the IHE consortium members to discuss implementing inclusive practices in their courses for the Fall 2024 academic semester. This event will be held again in November 2024 to prepare for Spring 2025 courses.

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

Both the OSES and the Office of Early Learning and Literacy participated 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. 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.

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 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

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, 2023, through June 30, 2024, a total of 3,946 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>
Anderson	314 (94%)	19 (6%)	333
Charleston	632 (95%)	35 (5%)	667
Colleton	181 (96%)	7 (4%)	188
Horry	710 (96%)	31 (4%)	741
Richland	764 (92%)	63 (8%)	827
Spartanburg	884 (97%)	29 (3%)	913
York	261 (94%)	16 (6%)	277
Total	3746 (95%)	200 (5%)	3946

Early Childhood Advisory Council

The ECAC is a council that includes SC state agencies which have responsibility for early childhood programs and services. The vision of the ECAC is: “We will be successful when all children reach their highest potential.” The ECAC is responsible for the state’s early childhood strategic planning and in 2022 approved “For Our Future: South Carolina’s Birth through Five Plan.” The Plan focuses on addressing the needs of families and children, with particular emphasis on SC’s most vulnerable children and families. The plan includes but is not limited to promoting and supporting transitions from 4K to 5K (see the Palmetto Pre-K site), a cross-agency approach to supporting families via the First Five website and developing and implementing an integrated data system.

Palmetto Pre-K is a statewide initiative that connects families of 3- and 4-year-old children with free educational preschool programs in South Carolina. The Palmetto Pre-K Portal is a one-stop shop for finding free educational preschool programs in South Carolina. At PalmettoPreK.org, families can check their eligibility and search for programs by zip code to see available options at a glance. In the fiscal year 2023-2024, Palmetto Pre-K was visited by more than 61,000 unique visitors. As importantly, Palmetto Pre-K serves as the proof of concept that state agencies can successfully collaborate and serve parents across a range of programs. From the success of Palmetto Pre-K First Five SC was built.

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 publicly funded 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 eligibility screening and application processes, First Five SC helps families better understand their options and choose the programs and services that best meet their needs. In FY23-24, First Five SC received 155,881 unique website visitors and 12,838 families completed the screener. Of those families, 77% were eligible for at least one publicly funded early childhood program. FY 23-24 also was the first full year that families could complete applications for a range of programs, and 2383 applications were completed and submitted.

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 20 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](#).

First Steps 4K

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 157 four-year-old children with disabilities were served in First Steps facilities during the 2023–24 school year. The table below has the number of preschool children served by ethnicity.

Table 6. 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	0	91	0	20	44

Finances

Tuition for children participating in First Steps 4K is covered by CERDEP state funding. The amount of funds expended for 2023–24 was \$1,066,768.20.

Agency Information

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

Head Start

Head Start and Early Head Start are federally funded programs that promote school readiness for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers from families that meet income eligibility requirements. Head Start programs serve children between ages three and five years old. Early Head Start programs support pregnant women and families with children younger than three years of age.

There is a Head Start presence in 45 of the 46 counties in South Carolina. Sixteen Head Start programs in South Carolina provide services to children ages 3-5. Twelve of these programs are under the sponsorship of Community Action Agencies (CAAPS), and three are with school districts. Funding for these programs comes from the Region IV Office of Head Start located in Atlanta, Georgia.

There are four South Carolina Migrant Head Start sites. The East Coast Migrant Program, based in North Carolina, serves as the grantee. Services are provided to children ages 0-5, and funding is awarded from the Office of Head Start.

There are twenty-one Early Head Start programs providing services to children ages 0-3. Funding is processed through the Region IV Office of Head Start located in Atlanta, Georgia.

Sponsorship includes: CAAPS, school districts, local First Steps School Readiness Partnerships, and a United Way affiliated agency.

There is one federally recognized American Indian Head Start program in South Carolina that serves children ages 0-5. Funding is made possible through the American Indian Program Branch of the Office of Head Start located in Washington, DC.

Early Head Start/Childcare Partnership grants have been awarded to two local First Steps Partnerships, a CAAP Head Start/Early Head Start grantee and the South Carolina Association of Community Action Partnerships. In addition, the National Child Development Institute (CDI) is the temporary Aiken/Barnwell Head Start/Early Head Start, and the Charleston Early Head Start Childcare Partnership and provider. These grantees, as a group, are expected to serve 660 children, ages 0-3 in private settings.

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.

As of May 1, 2024, a total of 8,572 children in South Carolina received Head Start Services in 229 centers. Of the total children served, 78 were served in American Indian Head Start/Early Head Start and 270 children were served in home-based settings. Of the total served, 3,387 were age four. In addition, one grantee served as a state funded 4K provider, serving a total of 20 children.

Finances

Funding for each type of Head Start program in South Carolina is described above. The approximate federal operational funding awarded to the state is \$150,000,000. Sponsoring programs must acquire a 20% local match. The State Head Start Collaboration Office grant is awarded to the Governor, designated to a state agency and is under the oversight of the agency and an advisory committee.

Agency Information

Information regarding South Carolina's Head Start may be found [here](#).

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, South Carolina Child Care Inclusion Collaborative, The University of South Carolina Center for Disability Resources, 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.

The State Leadership Benchmarks of Quality tool was completed in the fall of 2023. Significant progress has been made in the percentage of indicators both in place and emerging since the addition of the state Pyramid Model Coordinator Role and the revitalization of the SLT.

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.

South Carolina Commission for the Blind (SCCB)

South Carolina Commission for the Blind (SCCB) believes it is crucial for children with vision loss to begin learning the independence skills necessary for future success as early as possible. SCCB's Children's Services Program provides services to eligible children who are blind or visually impaired to support them in adjusting to their vision loss, learning skills that will help them achieve independence, and connecting with a variety of community resources. To be eligible for the Children's Services Program, applicants must be ages 3-12 and meet the definition of legal blindness (visual acuity of 20/200 in the better eye, with correction or a visual field of 20 degrees or less) or have a progressive visual condition that may lead to blindness within 24 months.

Children's Services Counselors work with consumers and their families to conduct thorough assessments to identify each consumer's strengths and specific needs. Counselors request input from families during the assessment to help identify appropriate independence goals and services for the consumer. Once the assessment is completed, the counselor will collaborate with the family and consumer to develop the consumer's Individualized Service Plan (ISP). These plans are individualized based on the needs of the individual, can be amended as needed, and are reviewed annually.

Services provided to consumers of the Children's Services Program may include but are not limited to:

- counseling and guidance for students and parents,
- low vision evaluation,
- assistive technology assessments,
- low vision devices and equipment,
- orientation and mobility training,
- workshops and support groups for families,
- advocacy and support for the consumer and family, and
- consultation and coordination with community resources.

Children’s Services Counselors also connect consumers with community-based early intervention programs to assist families in obtaining services from professionals who specialize in visual impairments as well as infant, toddler, and child development. Counselors coordinate with several agencies and organizations to ensure all family and consumer concerns are appropriately addressed. Such organizations include, but are not limited to, eye care professionals, SC Department of Social Services, SC Department of Health and Human Services, SC Department of Disabilities and Special Needs, SC School for the Deaf and Blind, National Federation of the Blind South Carolina, Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired South Carolina, and local school districts.

Initiatives During 2023–24 School Year Included:

- Worked with other community agencies such as the Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired South Carolina, to provide orientation and mobility to preschool age children.
- Participated in conferences such as The Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER), community activities such as the Braille challenge, and public awareness events to promote the Children’s Services Program.
- Maintained contact and interaction with appropriate referral sources such as eye care professionals, school districts, and other community resources.

Demographics

SCCB served eight preschool-age children during the 2023–24 school year. The tables below illustrate the number of children served in each age group as well as the breakdown by ethnicity.

Table 7. Number of Preschool Children with Disabilities Served by Age Group

	Total
Age 3	4
Age 4	3
Age 5 (not yet kindergarten)	1
Total	8

Table 8. 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	Does not identify
Age 3	0	0	1	0	0	2	1
Age 4	0	0	2	0	0	1	0
Age 5	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Total	0	0	3	0	0	4	1

Finances

The total funds expended on children ages 3-5 were \$3,866.89. Program expenditures for preschool children were an average of \$483.36 per child during the past fiscal year. This amount may vary among cases, due to the child’s individual needs. State funds are appropriated for the SCCB Children’s Services Program.

Agency Information

The guidelines for Children’s Services are outlined in the program’s policies and procedures manual. The information includes services provided to eligible consumers, as well as counselors’ 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:

- DDSN developed and implemented a new process for qualifying providers. Nearly half of all applicants applied to be Early Intervention providers.
- Children were evaluated for DDSN eligibility through our Intake/Eligibility Division. Evaluations may include psychological and autism spectrum disorder testing.
- Evaluations for Autism eligibility increased by 37%.
- Record reviews for Autism eligibility determination increased by 35%.

- The number of children eligible for DDSN services in all categories increased to 7170 which represented an overall growth of 7.3%.
- Once eligibility was determined, families received family training and service coordination from qualified providers.
- 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 (HASCI).
 - 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 7,170 preschool-age children during the 2023–24 school year. The table below illustrates the number of children served in each age group.

Table 9. Number of Preschool Children with Disabilities Served by Age Group

	Total
Age 3	5,222
Age 4	3,598
Age 5 (not yet kindergarten)	1,958
Total	7,170

Finances

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

Table 10. Funds Expended on Children Ages 3-5 Served in Early Intervention

Fund Type	Amount
State Funds	\$5,328,318.56
Medicaid Funds	\$9,965,788.18
Total	\$15,294,106.74

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 Education Office of Early Learning and Literacy Child Early Reading Development and Education Program

The Child Early Reading Development and Education Program (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. The South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) served 67 CERDEP districts, one Charter district, and one charter school, with a statewide enrollment of over 14,600 CERDEP students as of March 2024.

CERDEP LEAs are required to administer one of two approved assessments: Individual Growth and Development Indicators (myIGDIs) 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 classes also must select curricula from a list approved by the SCDE.

Initiatives During the 2023–24 School Year Included:

- Supported CERDEP programs in maintaining high-quality instruction.
- Supported CERDEP expansion of classrooms, extended day, and summer programs.
- 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, district, and school levels on various topics such as the SC-ELS, creating literacy-rich environments, promoting literacy in math instruction, supporting writing and bookmaking, and providing early learning leader support, new teacher training, and teacher assistant sessions.
- Supported South Carolina Early Childhood Multi System of Support (SC EC MTSS) by collaborating with the state-level Pyramid PIECES team.
- Addressed suspension and expulsion with a statewide systematic approach.
- 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 through Five Strategic Plan as part of the Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC).
- Collaborated with other members of the ECAC on the state’s spring and summer Palmetto Pre-K Jamborees.
- 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.
- 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.
- Hosted family engagement sessions at the district and regional levels.
- Partnered with Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Southeast to provide a coaching cycle with the Emerging Literacy Professional Learning Community (PLC) demonstration sites and collaborated with REL for the study phase of the collaboration agreement.
- Served on the REL Governing Board.
- Generated and vetted family transition resources to disseminated across the state for 4K the registration process.
- Continued work on the Palmetto Drive to Five Leadership Team and the South Carolina Longitudinal Data System Leadership Teams.
- Reimbursed districts for the purchase of approved CERDEP curriculum.
- Connected schools to Countdown to Kindergarten opportunities and assisted in the planning of Countdown to Kindergarten celebrations.

Finances

Public and private providers are funded for instructional costs at a minimum rate of \$5,100 per student enrolled. First Steps and the Department of Education must provide an equitable distribution above the minimum between public and private providers. New providers participating for the first time in the current fiscal year and enrolling between one and six eligible children shall be eligible to receive at a minimum of \$1,000 per child in materials and equipment funding, with providers enrolling seven or more such children eligible for funding at a minimum of \$10,000. Total revenues for 2023-24 were \$74,250,759.06 and total expenditures were \$72,927,188.01.

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 access to quality child care through 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 (CCDF).

Initiatives during the 2023-24 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.

Pyramid Model initiatives are also 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 2023-2024 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 LEAs to expand their continuum of support to include inclusive placements for preschool children.

One strategy that is offered to districts who have completed the Special Education Itinerant Teacher (SEIT) Academy is the Early Transitions Initiative. The Early Transitions Initiative aims to expand the continuum of placements for 3-year-old children eligible for Part B 619 services by offering Child Care Scholarships administered by SC DSS Division of Early Care and Education using CCDF funds so that eligible children have access to a general education setting and can receive their services in their general education placement. Early Transitions is a collaborative between local school districts and community child care programs in their attendance area. Child care programs receive an accessibility assessment and training from the SC Child Care Inclusion Collaborative (SCIC) prior to children being placed in their program. This is a new initiative that is helping school districts include general education settings on their continuum of placements for three-year-old children with IEPs.

Eligibility criteria for the Early Transitions Initiative are described in the table below.

Table 11. Early Transitions Eligibility Criteria

School Districts	Child Care Programs	Child/Family
Completed the Special Education Itinerant Teacher (SEIT) Academy	Located in a SEIT Academy school district attendance zone	3-year-old child with an IEP
Implementing an itinerant teacher model for special education service delivery	Accessibility Evaluation – Able SC	General Education is the Least Restrictive Environment determined by the IEP team including the child’s parent(s)/guardian(s)
	Professional Development from SCIC: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ADA Basics for Child Care Providers: 2 hours • IDEA Part B 619 Overview: 1.5 hours • Building Blocks Basics for Child Care Providers: 1.5 hours • Promoting Engagement Using the Pyramid Model: 2.5 hours • Cara’s Kit: 7.5 hours + follow-up consultation 	

Table 12. Early Transitions Participation by District

District	Year	# of Early Transition Initiative Community Child Care Placements
Greenwood 50	2023	1
	2024	1
	Total	2
Spartanburg 5	2022	2
	2023	1
	2024	2
	Total	5

Demographics

SCDSS Division of Early Care and Education served a total of 362 preschool children with disabilities during the 2023-24 school year. The tables below illustrate the number of children served in each age group as well as the breakdown by ethnicity.

Table 13. Number of Preschool Children with Disabilities Served by Age Group

	Total
Age 3	182
Age 4	162
Age 5 (not yet kindergarten)	18
Total	362

Table 14. 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	113	0	15	29
Age 4	1	1	92	0	17	31
Age 5	0	0	10	0	5	2
Total	1	1	215	0	37	62

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 9/1/2023-5/31/2024 by age group.

Table 15. Funds Expended by Age Group

	Amount of Funds Expended
Age 3	\$606,305.00
Age 4	\$504,026.00
Age 5 (not yet kindergarten)	\$41,506.00
Total	\$1,151,837.00

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

Initiatives During the 2023–24 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 2023-24, five children in the three through five-year-old (not yet kindergarten) category of students were served. The tables below show how many children there were in each age group and information about ethnicity.

Table 16. Number of Preschool Children with Disabilities Served by Age Group

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

Table 17. 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	1
Age 4	0	0	0	0	0	0
Age 5 (not yet kindergarten)	0	0	0	0	0	4
Total	0	0	0	0	0	5

Finances

The SCSSDB 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.

Summary

The OSES continues to strive to provide high-level support and collaboration in a continuum for children ages three through five that emphasizes 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-old's, 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 2024-25 school year.

- The Preschool Committee of the Council will serve as the cross-sector Early Childhood Inclusion State Leadership Team. Per the joint policy statement, a recommendation was that each state should have a cross-sector leadership team to develop a shared vision and develop and implement a strategic plan to expand access to and participation in inclusive programs across sectors serving young children and their families. As part of this work, over the next year, the Preschool Committee of the Council proposes to do the following:
 - Ensure the leadership team includes a broad representation of agencies, programs and partners across the state.
 - Create a shared mission and vision.
 - Create common, universal language regarding the inclusion of young children with disabilities.
 - Research how many individual programs and agencies in the state are working in the early childhood sector and compile a list of supports and resources state-wide.
 - Support statewide implementation of high-quality evidence-based practices.

- The Preschool Committee of the Council also 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.

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>

Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs

Website: <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/files/policy-statement-on-inclusion-11-28-2023.pdf>