

STRATEGIC PLAN

2027 – 2029



Vision

Equipped families. Engaged communities.

Mission

Our mission is to provide programs, services, and information to strengthen families and communities in Darlington County.

Values

Community Engagement is vital as we aim to create a pathway to success for children and families in Darlington County.

Compassion and **Empathy** are fundamental to our relationships. As we open our hearts and minds to the needs of others in our community, mutual trust is formed, which is a cornerstone of successful relationships.

Transparency and **Accountability** are critical components of our relationships with funders, individuals, parents, community partners, and other stakeholders.

Families are our greatest resource. We **advocate**, **educate**, and **demonstrate** the importance of engaged families, ready early learners, and healthy, supportive communities.

Goal

At least 50% of Darlington County's children are ready for kindergarten by 2029.

Message from the Executive Director



Darnell Byrd McPherson

Executive Director
Darlington County First
Steps

Darlington County First Steps is committed to strengthening families and ensuring children are ready for success when they enter school. This strategic plan reflects what we heard directly from families and community partners—parent education, mental health support, and access to care and community resources are critical to early childhood well-being. By expanding evidence-based programs, strengthening partnerships, and serving as a trusted community connector, we will continue building a strong foundation for Darlington County’s youngest children and the adults who care for them.

Darnell Byrd McPherson

Message from the Board Chair



Howard Nettles

Board Chair

Darlington County First Steps

This strategic plan represents a shared vision for Darlington County’s children and families. Through collaboration, data-driven decision-making, and community engagement, Darlington County First Steps will continue to serve as a convener and connector. By investing in parents, supporting mental health, and strengthening access to healthcare, we move closer to our collective goal—ensuring every child enters school healthy and ready to learn.

Howard Nettles

Strategic Plan Process

CONVENE

Hold community convening to understand needs and resources for families with young children

July 2025 – November 2025



UNDERSTAND

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

July 2025 – November 2025



PRIORITIZE

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

July 2025 – November 2025



PLAN

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

November 2025 – February 2026



APPLY

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

March 2026



IMPLEMENT

Execute the programs and services outlined in the Strategic Plan

July 2026 – June 2029



MONITOR

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

July 2026 – June 2029



Priority Area One: Expand Home-Visiting and Parent Education Programs.

<p style="text-align: center;">INPUTS</p> <p><i>What resources in the county exist? Is there funding available to support your proposed activities?-</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">STRATEGY</p> <p><i>What is the local partnership going to do? Label as program or core function activity</i></p>
<p><u>Parents as Teachers (PAT) Program</u></p> <p><u>Countdown to Kindergarten (CTK) Program</u></p> <p><u>Motheread/Fatheread (MR/FR) Program</u></p> <p><u>Reach Out and Read (ROAR) Program</u></p> <p>Trained PAT parent educators, CTK kindergarten teachers, MR/FR facilitators, and trained ROAR pediatricians</p> <p>Partnerships with healthcare providers, early childhood programs, schools, and community organizations</p> <p>South Carolina First Steps funding and local investments</p>	<p>Program Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PAT & CTK: Expand home-visiting services countywide to increase access to parent education and early childhood developmental supports. • MR/FR: Facilitate parent group sessions designed to enhance children’s reading readiness and vocabulary development within the home environment, while also providing age-appropriate books to help families build home libraries. • ROAR: Continue partnership with pediatric providers to improve children’s reading readiness, parental awareness of early literacy impacts, and build home libraries with age-appropriate books.
<p style="text-align: center;">OUTPUT</p> <p><i>SMART, tangible indicators of progress</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">OUTCOME</p> <p><i>SMART effects of program or services measured during or shortly after enrollment</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the number of families served through these strategies by 30% by June 30, 2029. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the percentage of participating parents demonstrating improved knowledge of child development & parenting practices by 20% by June 30, 2029.

Priority Area Two: Increase mental health support for parents of young children.

INPUTS	STRATEGY
<p>Partnerships with Morehouse School of Medicine Center for Maternal Health Equity</p> <p>Be Strong Families / Parent Café facilitators</p> <p>DCFS Benefits Counselors</p> <p>Mental health, family support, and faith-based partnerships</p> <p>Funding investments from local and national organizations</p>	<p>Core Functions Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobilize communities by elevating program and partner services that offer early-intervention programs and mental health supports. • Coordinate community/family gatherings via Parent Cafes. • Participate in and host community engagement and outreach activities.
OUTPUT	OUTCOME
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase family participation in Parent Cafés, counseling services, and early-intervention services by 25% by June 30, 2029. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decrease reported high parenting stress among participating parents by 15% by June 30, 2029.

Priority Area Three: Strengthen care & resource navigation for families with young children.

INPUTS	STRATEGY
<p>Center for Community Health Alignment partnership</p> <p>Benefits Counselors trained in resource navigation & certified Community Health Workers</p> <p>Partnerships with healthcare centers and community & social service agencies</p> <p>Funding support from local and statewide agencies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Core Function Activity: Serve as a local portal by facilitating care & resource navigation to help vulnerable families obtain childcare services, maintain a primary care provider, and preventive care for young children.
OUTPUT	OUTCOME
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase the number of families receiving care & resource navigation assistance by 30% by June 30, 2029. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase the percentage of participating families who access needs by 20% by June 30, 2029.

Acknowledgments

Darlington County First Steps gratefully acknowledges community members, partner organizations, board members, and staff who contributed their time, insight, and expertise to the FY27–29 Needs and Resource Assessment and the development of this strategic plan.

