



Statement of the Early Learning Council of Georgetown County to the Joint Citizens and Legislative Committee on Children

What is The Early Learning Council of Georgetown County (ELC)?

The ELC is a civic leadership group whose mission is to champion the education and well being of young children through advocacy, research development, and promotion of opportunities that allow them to reach their full potential. The ELC's members include experienced educators, school administrators, health care professionals and non-profit executives. While ELC members participate solely in their individual capacity, they are affiliated with other organizations working to ensure that the children in our county will reach their full potential. (The organizations with whom our members are affiliated are listed at the end of this statement).

The ELC has initiated several other community groups that are now working to meet the educational, developmental and health needs of children, including the Health Care Collaborative for Children and Youth, Early Childcare Providers Network, Georgetown County Achieves Together, and the Early Childhood Physicians Advisory Council.

What is working for our county?

We are grateful to the South Carolina Legislature for funding full-day pre-K 4 programs under CDEP for eligible children in either public or private classrooms as selected by the parents. Many individuals and institutions in our county now are working in collaborative groups to leverage the impact of the Legislature's investment in our children's future. We are confident that these pre-K 4 programs will make a difference. Neuroscience research on brain development has demonstrated that such programs have a long-term impact on a child's ability to learn and ultimately to become a contributing member of society. Without such early investments, far greater expenditures would be required later for remediation, special education, drug treatment, and juvenile justice programs. Thus, these pre-K4 programs are both beneficial to the children and fiscally prudent.

How can the Legislature help both our children and our economy thrive?

The South Carolina Legislature can help both our children and the economy of our state and county thrive by fully funding two programs: 1) BabyNet and 2) SC Voucher.

BabyNet. The return on the investment in CDEP pre-K4 programs would be even greater if infants and toddlers with apparent disabilities or developmental delays were promptly evaluated and provided appropriate services. BabyNet is supposed to provide such evaluations and services under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Unfortunately, South Carolina is the only state in the country that has failed to meet its deliverables under IDEA Part C for five years in a row. In Georgetown County infants and toddlers with apparent disabilities or developmental delays must wait over three months to even get an appointment to be evaluated through BabyNet. The delays in diagnosis and treatment of disabilities and developmental delays puts these children further behind. With timely treatment, these children will be ready and able to receive the full benefit of the pre-K4 program.

SC Voucher. The SC Voucher program, which is administered by the SC Division of Early Care and Education (DECE), helps pay for child care for children whose parents are working or attending school and have an income below 150% of the federal poverty level. In South Carolina, 41% of children live in homes below that level – only two states, Mississippi and New Mexico, have a higher percentage. Over 53% of children in Georgetown County and over 41% statewide live in single parent homes. There is a strong correlation between single parent homes and low incomes. According to the Institute for Child Success, less than a third of low-income families received assistance with childcare either in the form of tax credits or SC Voucher. The Human Services Collaborative has identified lack of childcare as a major deterrent to parental

employment. Ensuring that SC Vouchers are availability to all eligible families would enable many more parents to work, especially those who are single.

The SC Voucher Program also incentivizes childcare providers to offer quality programs. In addition to the base voucher rate, providers are eligible to receive quality incentive payments if their programs are rated higher than Level C under DECE's voluntary ABC Quality Program. The amount of the incentive payment increases as the level of quality increases up to Level A+. Expanding funding for the SC Voucher Program will encourage providers to keep improving the quality of their programs.

Why now?

We ask that the South Carolina Legislature demonstrate its commitment to ensuring that both the children and the economy of our state thrive by fully funding both the SC Voucher program and BabyNet and to bring BabyNet in compliance with IDEA Part C. With the current budget surplus, now is the time to make this investment that will pay off for years to come for children and our economy.

List of Organizations With Which ELC Participants Are Affiliated

Cliff and Carolyn Ellis Foundation
Coastal Carolina University
Department of Juvenile Justice
Georgetown County First Steps
Frances P. Bunnelle Foundation
Georgetown Chamber of Commerce
Georgetown County Library
Georgetown County School District
Georgetown Police Department
Black River United Way
Georgetown Children's Recovery Center
Georgetown Literacy Initiative
Georgetown Outreach Ministries
Healthy Learners
Head Start
Institute for Child Success
Miss Ruby's Kids
Nurse Family Partnership
ParentsCare
South Carolina Pathways
Still Learning, Inc
Tara Hall
The Village Group
Tidelands Health
Waccamaw Council of Governments