

Annual Report 2023-2024



**First Start
Partnerships**
for **Children & Families**

Growing **Hearts**
&
Minds

The annual report is shared with the public through the First Start Partnerships for Children and Families website, firststartpartnerships.org.

A Message from the President & CEO



Annette Searfoss Ph.D.
CEO

First Start Partnerships for Children and Families has been offering high quality early childhood programs since 1965. First Start was known as Franklin County Head Start until February 1, 2019. Our community's needs have changed over the past sixty years. More families qualify for high quality early childhood services, with almost 70% of Franklin County's families qualifying for a free preschool option through federal and state funds. Most of those families were working outside the home - both mothers and fathers in dual income households, and of course single parents need to work to support themselves and their families.

Some families, like my son, Nick, have parents who can retire early to provide that care while families work. My husband, Kevin, gave up a well-paying federal service job when we discovered the scarcity of high quality early childhood programs in the area. Nick's wife, Megan, was blessed with a mother, Patty, who was able to reduce her work hours at her hair salon, Snips Hair Studio in Waynesboro. Our grandchildren still attend preschool, but do not need a full day option due to our family's ability to care for them.

Too many families do not have that option, and must turn to trusted early childhood educators to not only teach their children the social, emotional, physical and cognitive skills to be successful in school and in life, but to also care for their children while they work.

First Start responded to our community needs by piloting full day preschool services, growing the availability each year with multiple funding streams. We also developed a Family Center to educate our community's families about the importance of children's healthy brain development in the years before kindergarten.

None of this would have been possible without our teachers, and their willingness to learn more about children's developmental needs, family partnerships, and school expectations for kindergarten readiness.

To support each of our teacher's growth and learning, we partner with the Early Childhood Education (ECE) Professional Development Organization (PDO) at the PA State System of Higher Education (PASSHE), managed by Shippensburg University.

We piloted a PA Registered Early Childhood Registered Apprenticeship Program with Shippensburg University in 2019, and it has expanded to multiple professional development options for early childhood educators in high schools, early childhood programs, and colleges and universities. In each program, students study while working in early childhood programs, earning income and college credits within a supportive community of practice.

First Start is now the Early Childhood Registered Apprenticeship Intermediary Hub for the south-central region, not just Franklin County. First Start created a future for so many of our families - including our own teachers. In the first five years of First Start's life, we created a new vision for high quality early childhood experiences. And we could not have done it without YOU - our families, schools, communities and staff members - who partner in service to our future generation- our babies.

In partnership,
Annette



Our Core Values



We value **family**

as children depend on family for love, safety, health and learning. We nurture a family-friendly workplace so our staff can be there for their families too.



We value **compassion**

dedicated to love, joy, empathy and hope necessary to support children, families and our selves to be come who we want to be.



We value **excellence**

and the continuous process of setting goals, reviewing progress, and planning for improved outcomes for children, families, and our organization.



We value **partnerships**

for the connections to others that allow us to serve our children, families, and communities better than we can serve them alone.



We value **equity**

to ensure equal opportunities for children, families and staff members regardless of race, ethnicity, ability, religion, language, family income, family structure, geography, gender identity and sexual orientation.

Our Mission:

We partner with families, schools, and communities to ensure that each child arrives ready for kindergarten

Growing **Hearts**
&
Minds

Investing in the Early Childhood Workforce

First Start launches The Bloom Center

In January 2023, Franklin County Government awarded three grants to Franklin County's early childhood education efforts, totaling \$450,000. First Start Partnerships for Children and Families launched its **Bloom Center** with \$300,000 of those funds.

The Bloom Professional Development Center (or The Bloom Center) supports the *recruitment, orientation and retention* of qualified early childhood teachers, directors and family child care home operators in Franklin County and the South-Central Region.

The Bloom Center Pilot, completed in June 2024, was a pilot program in partnership with South Central Community Action's Program (SCCAP) Early Learning Resource Center, Waynesboro Area School District, PASSHE's Professional Development Organization, and six Waynesboro-area early childhood programs (as well as First Start's Waynesboro locations): Waynesboro Early Learning Center; Today's New Start Learning Center; Beanstalk Daycare; Trinity Nursery School; Faith Builders Daycare; and Waynesboro YMCA.

The pilot provided teachers and directors free credit-bearing training and education, as well as compensation and materials. This training and education was followed with onsite coaching to transfer the strategies learned into practice. Six early childhood Directors also participated in a monthly Community of Practice for administrators.

The Bloom Center was launched in response to a needs assessment conducted by Harriet Dichter and Gail Nourse for First Start Partnerships for Children and Families. The needs assessment report, ***Phase One: Improving the Early Childhood System in Franklin County***, found that early childhood programs were barely surviving; some programs had already or were planning to close classrooms or the entire program due to the lack of qualified teachers.

As a result of the pilot:

- **Orientation:** 100% of participants completed all coursework.
- **Retention:** 89% of teachers remained employed at their early childhood program.
- **Continuing Education:** 4 teachers enrolled in Child Development Associate (CDA) or associate's degree program; 3 teachers were trained and hired as Coaches in First Start's Early Childhood Registered Apprenticeship Program.

The Bloom Center Pilot showed that a combination of [Soil] [Seeds] [Water] [Sun] result in increases in professional growth while engaged in the pilot, as well as post-pilot.

Each Child's Unique Path to Kindergarten Readiness

As we approach the end of each school year, we reflect on the bittersweet feeling of watching our children prepare to leave for kindergarten. While we will miss them greatly, we take pride in knowing we've provided them with the strong roots they need to succeed in their next educational chapter.

Kindergarten readiness looks different for each child, and First Start's approach acknowledges this individuality. Our teachers adapt their strategies to meet each child's needs—helping an academically-advanced child learn to manage emotional outbursts by teaching him to verbalize feelings and use mindful breathing techniques, or supporting an insecure child by familiarizing her with kindergarten expectations until she feels confident enough that she won't need to take her favorite security blanket with her. Through personalized guidance, each child develops the specific skills they need for a successful transition.

Our teachers work alongside our coaches, special education director, and community support agencies to ensure that each child arrives ready for his or her kindergarten experience.

HEAD START AND EARLY HEAD START QUICK FACTS

Head Start

- 399 Children and 370 Families were served
- 98% Average Monthly Enrollment
- 14% (399/2790 children in county) of Franklin County's eligible children served
- 34% of children (135/399) received Physical Exams, and 20% of children (80/399) received Dental Exams

Early Head Start

- 122 Children and 96 Families were served
- 95% Average Monthly Enrollment
- 4% (122/2790 children in county) of Franklin County's eligible children served
- 72% of children (88/122) received Physical Exams, and 51% of children (62/122) received Dental Exams



Growing Children, Growing Teachers, Growing Leaders

Angel, a former parent in our program, began her employment at First Start in November 2019 as a classroom support staff. In the last five years, she relentlessly pursued education to advance her career at First Start. She completed her CDA and Associate's Degree and began working as an Assistant Teacher. She is nearly finished with her Bachelor's Degree now, and this year, she took on the role of Lead Teacher.

Angel understands that professional development is not just about developing *her* skills. It's about being better able to support her students. At the beginning of the school year, there was a student in Angel's class who didn't know how to handle his anger in a positive way. He would throw things and scream as loud as he could when he got angry. Angel was able to use some of the techniques that she learned through her formal and informal training to give this student strategies to better control his impulses, and it has made a big difference for him. He now asks for help when he needs it and uses his words to explain what is upsetting him. He also uses the timer and cozy corner when he needs a break and takes deep breaths to calm his body.

She has paid it forward by serving as a coach for coworkers who are completing the CDA apprenticeship program, and she is also using her knowledge to help her students grow.

Angel is just one example of how First Start is growing children, growing families, and growing leaders in and around Franklin County.

PRE-K COUNTS QUICK FACTS

- 307 Children and 298 Families were served
- 99% Average Monthly Enrollment
- 8% (307/2790 children in county) of Franklin county's eligible children served
- 53% of children (164/307) received Physical Exams, and 31% of children (94/307) received Dental Exams



Early Childhood Education Apprenticeship

Growing the next generation of Early Childhood Educators

Since piloting Early Childhood Registered Apprenticeship in 2019, the program has grown to include 13 employers and 40 apprentices to date. In addition to the Level 1, CDA (Child Development Associate) Credential, First Start Partnerships also offers a Level 2, Associate's Degree Apprenticeship. Both programs are offered fully online and include many supports for Apprentices such as on-site coaching, technology and tutoring.

In June of 2024, current Apprentices were asked how their teaching practices changed as a result of participating in the Apprenticeship program. Here are a few responses:

"I have become more knowledgeable in the early childhood education field and have a better view of how to better assist the children in our classrooms, how to set up appropriate classrooms, how to choose appropriate materials, and learned strategies to support strong relationships with the children and families. My view has changed on several things that pertain to early childhood education."

"I have gained understanding on the meaning of teaching children and practicing what I have learned during my coursework in my classroom."

"I have been very grateful for this program as it has helped me achieve my goal of completing my CDA credential."

Due to the continued partnership with the ECE PDO @ PASSHE and success with the Early Childhood Apprenticeship program, First Start Partnerships was asked to be the Intermediary for the PDO's Dual Enrollment program for high school students.

Currently, First Start Partnerships supports 55 students in 14 school districts or CTE's. Many of the students who have successfully completed the dual enrollment coursework have continued their educational journey in early childhood education, working towards an Associate's or Bachelor's degree while continuing to work in the field of early childhood education.

At a time, when early childhood programs are dealing with staffing shortages, the dual enrollment program has provided a pipeline for high school students to enter the field.



First Start Opens Second Community Hub

In its first six years as First Start Partnerships for Children and Families (formerly Franklin County Head Start), we created a new vision for high quality early childhood experiences that meet the community’s changing needs for children, families, schools and communities. We’ve been Growing Children, Growing Families, and Growing Leaders each and every day.

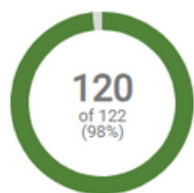
Our first Community Hub was established in 2019 at the Waynesboro Area High School. The second is at 871 Stanley Avenue in Chambersburg, a former child-care center for the women who worked at the Stanley Manufacturing clothing factory. And in 2023, we opened our newest Community Hub at the old Lincoln Lanes Bowling Alley on Rt. 30 in Chambersburg.

The Community Hubs house classrooms, commercial kitchens, indoor and outdoor play areas, Family Centers, staff lounges, and Bloom Centers, our staff development spaces. We partner with Cumberland Valley School of Music to provide almost daily art and music experiences for our preschoolers. We also partner with the Local Intermediate Unit and Early Intervention programs that serve our shared children with identified special needs.

Most importantly to families, our two Chambersburg Early Learning Centers are open from 7 am to 5 pm, Monday through Friday, during the school year. Families can choose to bring their children just to a morning or afternoon session – or they can choose a full day so they can work or attend school. Guess what the overwhelming majority of families choose?

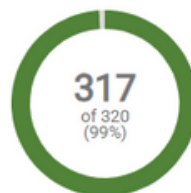
Immunization Status

EHS 2023-2024



■ Medical Home: 120
■ No Medical Home: 2

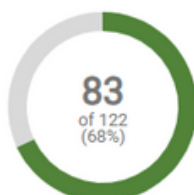
HS 2023- 2024



■ Medical Home: 317
■ No Medical Home: 3

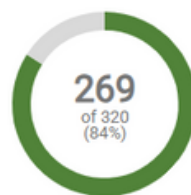
Health Insurance

EHS 2023-2024



■ Dental Home: 83
■ No Dental Home: 39

HS 2023- 2024



■ Dental Home: 269
■ No Dental Home: 51

Our Vision

Ready Children
Stronger Families
Vibrant Communities

“We live in a world in which we need to share responsibility.

It’s easy to say, ‘It’s not my child, not my community, not my world, not my problem.’

Then there are those who see the need and respond. I consider those people my heroes.”

~Fred Rogers

Funding and Expenditures

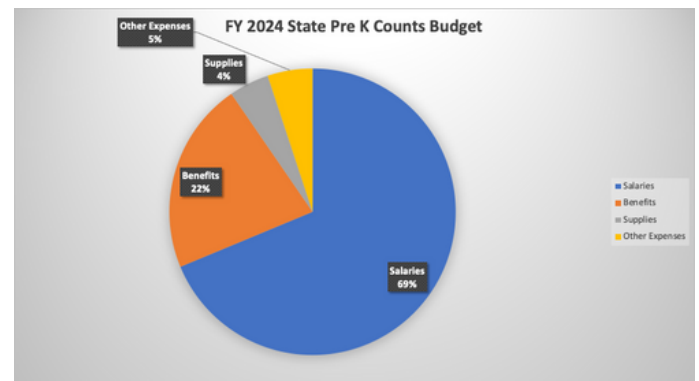
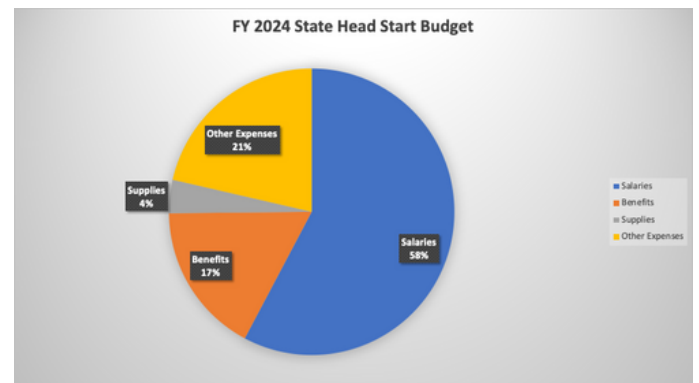
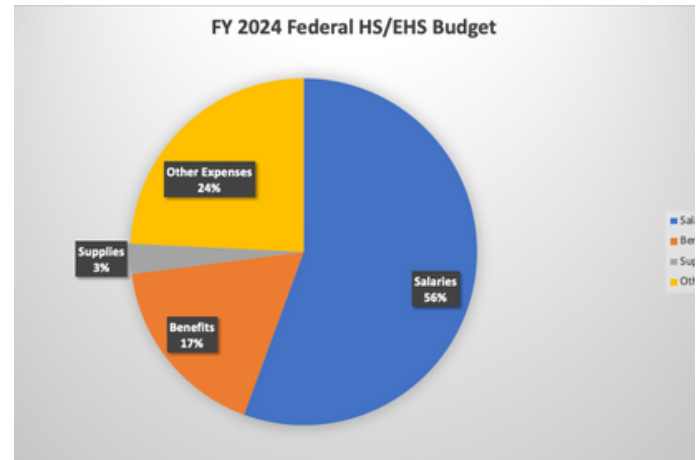
At the close of the 2023-2024 program year, First Start Partnerships for Children & Families (FSP), the grantee for the Head Start program in Franklin County, was funded to serve a total of 762 children with federal and state funds.

Combined, the organization received \$10,272,287 to operate the Head Start, Early Head Start & PreK Counts programs. In both the Federal and State budgets, personnel wages and benefits assume the majority of expenses.

In FY2024 FSP received \$4,143,823 in federal funding from the Administration for Children & Families to serve 351 children. FSP received \$1,312,092 in Pennsylvania State Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program (HSSAP) funds to serve 75 children. Partnerships with five Franklin County school districts resulted in \$3,337,876 in Pennsylvania PreK Counts (PKC) funds to serve 336 children. FSP received CACFP funds from the US Department of Agriculture to support nutrition services for all children of \$387,409.

Additional revenue from partnerships, grants, and other revenue streams contributed an additional \$1,091,817.

The most recent audit for the period August 1, 2023 - July 31, 2024 was performed by SEK CPA's and Advisors. In the independent auditor's report, the auditors expressed a "clean opinion" showing conformity with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America.





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