What is First Step?

First Step is a prekindergarten program in Newport News Public Schools. Primarily funded by state and federal funds, it provides school readiness activities for 4 and 5 year-old children, in full-day programs. Classes are made up of 18 students, with a licensed teacher and teacher assistant.

The program has expanded from serving fewer than 400 students to serving approximately 1,440 students through reallocating the division’s Title I funds from a remediation to an early intervention focus. First Step is free for children who qualify and transportation is provided.

The First Step Program has 4 full day centers:
- Marshall Early Learning Center
- Lee Hall Early Childhood Center
- Watkins Early Childhood Center
- Denbigh Early Childhood Center

1,440 available student slots
80 classes
3 special education classes

Who is eligible?

To be eligible for the program a child must:

- live in a Newport News Public School zone;
- be 4 years old by September 30 of that school year;
- be completely toilet trained and
- qualify based on a preschool screening test.

The preschool screening test allows ranking students according to need for the program. This ranking list is used to accept students with the greatest need first and then continue to accept students from the ranking list, from lowest scores to highest, until all spaces are filled.

Funding:

Funding is provided by Virginia Preschool Initiative funds, Federal Title 1 funds, and local funds.

Total: $10,007,307

How effective is the program?

The program currently serves approximately 52% of the school division’s Kindergarten population. PALS testing results show that students reach or exceed the benchmark score more often than students without preschool experience; preparing them for a strong start in Kindergarten!