



Investing in Early Learning: Bright Spots in North Carolina

NC Polling 2014, 2016 and 2018

Since 2014, support for early education has continued to rise among North Carolina voters across the political spectrum, according to a bipartisan poll released in 2018 by the North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation (NCECF). A strong majority of Republicans, Independents and Democrats want more investments in early learning—including providing greater access to affordable child care, Smart Start, NC Pre-K and programs that build parenting skills. Support for expanded investments in the state’s signature early childhood programs, NC Pre-K and Smart Start, has grown from 74 percent in 2014 to 86 percent in 2018, with Republican support increasing by 22 points. More information about the 2018 poll is available at:

<https://buildthefoundation.org/2018/09/nc-voters-want-the-state-to-double-funding-for-early-childhood/>

Asheville Buncombe Preschool Planning Collaborative

The Buncombe Partnership for Children and Children First/Communities in Schools convened a planning team of 25 community members in 2015. The collaborative created a collective plan to ensure access to affordable, high-quality preschool for every 3- and 4-year-old in Buncombe County. The Collaborative’s recommendations for expanding quality preschool are available at:

<https://www.abppc.org/>

In 2017, the Buncombe County Commissioners approved a change to the county’s economic development incentives policy to, among other things, expand access to preschool. Commissioners voted to invest \$250,000 from the economic development incentive fund in the county’s preschoolers. <http://buildthefoundation.org/2017/11/county-recognizes-early-learning-as-economic-development/>

Local parents, alongside business, health and nonprofit leaders, launched Family-Friendly Affordable Buncombe in 2018. The initiative advocated for the property tax revenues from the sale of Mission Health to be allocated toward community-wide investments in early childhood education, homes and apartments that are affordable for working families and better public transit. In October 2018, Buncombe County Commissioners voted to create an Early Childhood Education and Development Fund. The fund will annually provide \$3.6 million to address the critical needs of affordability, access, quality and workforce training to better serve children birth through preschool across the county. <https://familyfriendlybuncombe.org/media-kit/>

Bertie County

Since 2015, the Bertie County Commissioners have provided more than \$100,000 per year from the county budget to fund programs for children and families such as Better Beginnings for Bertie Children.

Dare County

Since 2004, Dare County has provided more than \$2.83 million to Children & Youth Partnership for Dare County, Inc. for Smart Start services for health, early literacy, family support and child care resource and referral. The funds are provided from local property tax revenue and are included in the county's Department of Health and Human Services budget.

Durham's Community Early Education/Preschool Task Force

Durham's school board, county commissioners and city council passed resolutions in support of universal, high-quality preschool for Durham's children in 2015. The Durham's Community Early Education/Preschool Task Force was convened in 2016 to develop a plan to serve all 3- and 4-year-olds in Durham County in high-quality preschool by 2023. The plan prioritizes serving 4-year-olds from low-income families by August 2019. As a starting point, the city of Durham committed sales tax funds to early childhood education in its 2016-2017 budget. The city provided an additional \$500,000 to support Pre-K in Durham Public Schools.

A supply and demand study was completed in 2018 by Durham County and the Child Care Services Association to further inform the 2023 goals by understanding parent demand for preschool and the capacity needs to meet that demand. More information is available at: <http://www.dconc.gov/government/departments-a-e/board-of-commissioners/state-of-durham-county-s-young-children>

Forsyth County Universal Pre-K Steering Committee

A group of community leaders formed the Forsyth County Universal Pre-K Steering Committee in June 2014. The Steering Committee explored how to improve the quality and expand the capacity of center-based, early childhood settings 4-year-olds as well as what factors should be considered in creating a quality universal Pre-K system. In 2015 and 2016, the Steering Committee established standards for a high-quality system, studied the options for local funding, and published a position paper. Under a new name – the Pre-K Priority – the Steering Committee will be publishing a comprehensive report and set of recommendations for how to proceed with Pre-K expansion in Forsyth County. A public education and engagement campaign has been funded by the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust.

A Community Advisory Council consisting of civic leaders and representatives from across the community will form in the spring of 2019 to guide and champion the process of expanding access to high-quality Pre-K programs.

More information is available at: https://familyservicesforsyth.org/pre_k_priority/

Mecklenburg County Early Education Initiatives

Since 1996, Mecklenburg County has invested in Bright Beginnings, a pre-kindergarten program for 4-year-olds administered through the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools at elementary schools across the county. The program currently serves 3,240 students in 180 classrooms in 53 elementary schools. NC Pre-K also operates in the county, serving 1,414 children in 79 classrooms located in 28 community-based high-quality child care centers.

In June of 2018, the Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioners approved a three-quarters of a penny increase in the property tax rate, raising over \$9 million to fund "MECK Pre-K." The

increase was the first investment toward voluntary, universal pre-k for all 4-year-old children in the county. In the fall of 2018, 33 MECK Pre-K classrooms, administered by Smart Start of Mecklenburg County, opened in 20 child care centers throughout the county, serving 600 children. In total, more than 5,000 4-year-old children in Mecklenburg County are in public preschool (Bright Beginnings, NC Pre-K, and MECK Pre-K). The goal is to reach all 4-year-old children over the next six years. Currently about 12,000 children enter kindergarten in Mecklenburg County each year.

The road to universal preschool in Mecklenburg County began in 2016 when the Board of County Commissioners passed a resolution supporting access to early childhood education for all children in the county from birth to age 5. The Charlotte Executive Leadership Council (a group of more than two dozen CEOs) funded a \$500,000 two-part study to develop recommendations and an implementation plan. The five-point Early Childhood Education Action Plan was presented to the Board in September of 2017. The implementation plan is expected to be released in the winter of 2019. The September 2017 report is available at:

<https://www.mecknc.gov/news/Documents/ECE%20Full%20Report%20Creating%20Opportunities%20FINAL%20Sept%2026%202017%20%281%29.pdf>

More information about Bright Beginnings and NC Pre-K (both administered by Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools) is located here: <http://www.cms.k12.nc.us/cmsdepartments/ci/pre-kservices/Pages/default.aspx>. More information about MECK Pre-K can be found here: <http://www.smartstartofmeck.org/meckprek/>

Transylvania County Early Childhood Initiative

Transylvania County government formed an Early Childhood Initiative in 2015 to focus attention on early childhood development and school preparedness. The Initiative published a “State of the Young Child” report based on seven months of research, which showed that 77 percent of Transylvania County children were arriving to kindergarten unprepared. The report spurred action by the county and multiple social service providers and organizations, which yielded a 12 percent improvement in kindergarten readiness.

In 2017, the Community Foundation of Western North Carolina awarded the Smartly United Early Childhood Collective (Smart Start and United Way of Transylvania County) a \$100,000 grant over two years to begin implementing its plan to increase access, quality and affordability of early education, with the aim of improving kindergarten readiness. More information is available at: <http://www.unitedwaytransylvania.org/state-young-child-transylvania-county-report-released-12142015>

The work of the Early Childhood Initiative was instrumental in attracting the attention of Sesame Workshop, the non-profit educational organization behind Sesame Street. In 2018, Transylvania County was the first rural county in the United States to be chosen for Sesame Street in Communities. This initiative will support parents, caregivers, and community providers in their efforts to give all children, especially the most vulnerable, a strong, healthy start.

Wake County

Wake County Commissioners voted in 2015 to invest in expanding NC Pre-K in their county. The 2015-2016 county budget provided just over \$325,000 to serve an additional 144 young

children. The county budget for NC Pre-K increased to \$488,000 in 2017, serving 359 children. The 2017-2018 budget provided an additional \$100,000 dollar-to-dollar match to encourage community investment. For fiscal year 2018-2019, the county is investing \$1.2 million in the NC Pre-K program to serve an additional 1,650 children. The program blends Wake County funding with support from Smart Start, the NC Division of Child Development and Early Education and private contributions to serve eligible children through the Wake County Public School System, Head Start and private child care. Wake County has signaled interest in eliminating wait lists and serving all income-eligible children. More information is available at:
<http://financingtools.buildthefoundation.org/project/wakecounty/>

Resources

North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation <i>Local Funding for Early Learning: A Community Toolkit</i>	http://financingtools.buildthefoundation.org/
NC Budget and Tax Center <i>Results of 2016 Ballot Initiatives in North Carolina</i>	https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B1NAbOK_eLwHNm51ZENhWI93SWM/view?usp=sharing
First 2000 Days	http://www.first2000days.org/
North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation <i>Investing Today in North Carolina’s Workforce of Tomorrow, 2017</i>	https://files.buildthefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Business-Fact-Sheet-2017.pdf
Governing: The States and Localities “The New Strategy for Raising Money for Kids,” December 2016	www.governing.com/topics/health-human-services/gov-ballot-dedicated-tax-childrens-fund.html
Forum for Youth Investment	http://forumfyi.org/childrens-funding-project
Funding the Next Generation	http://www.fundingthenextgeneration.org/

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