Creating Opportunity: An Action Plan for Early Childhood Education

A Report by the Mecklenburg County Early Childhood Education Executive Committee

September 26, 2017

Acknowledgments

The Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners, the County Manager, and the Early Childhood Education Executive Committee acknowledge with deep appreciation the Charlotte Executive Leadership Council's generous financial support of this study of early care and education to advance opportunity for our community's children ages birth to five and their families.

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Executive Summary

The research is clear: Early childhood experiences wire the brain for learning and lay the foundation for success that extends well into adulthood. This makes access to early care and education (ECE) programs for children from birth to age five critically important to the success of children in school and their ability to become productive members of society.

The release of a study[1] ranking Charlotte 50th of 50 cities in terms of economic mobility was a call to action for the Charlotte community, which has already begun to respond in two significant ways:

- The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Opportunity Task Force[2] was formed and after studying the issues, called for the community at large to "*boldly embrace and rally around a vision of Charlotte-Mecklenburg as a community that cares about all our children and youth—regardless of income, race or zip code—and where all our children feel they belong, have big dreams, and find the opportunities to achieve those dreams.*"[3]

  The Task Force identified early care and education as its first determinant and called on the community to "*make the necessary investments to ensure all children in Mecklenburg County from birth to age five have access to quality early care and education.*"[4]
- The Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) adopted a resolution supporting early childhood education for all children birth to age five.[5]

Mecklenburg County Commission Resolution Supporting Early Childhood Education For All Children from Birth to Age 5

"It is hereby resolved, that the Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners supports early childhood education in Mecklenburg County for all resident children from birth to age five (5) and developing and advancing a community vision for early childhood education, including identifying reliable funding mechanisms and developing a phased plan for achieving that community vision."

Resolution adopted, December 20, 2016, https://mecklenburg.legistar.com/MeetingDetail.aspx?ID=450516&GUID=0FCFAF2E-A5BC-4910-9EE7-9D0F607581A6&Options=info&Search=

In response, County Manager Dena Diorio asked a broad array of stakeholders to join an Executive Committee, which over a nine-month period:

- Met 13 times for in-depth discussion and review of research;
- Examined Mecklenburg County's ECE landscape and access to ECE programs for children from birth to age five;
- Considered opportunities, challenges, and costs to expand access to high-quality ECE programs for all children under age five in the county;
- Discussed lessons learned from other communities with innovative ECE models; and
- Developed recommendations to significantly expand access to ECE programs over the next six years, creating a pathway forward to one day reach all children birth to age five.

Gathering Community Views

To gauge public interest and will in ECE expansion for *all* children ages birth to five, a county-wide poll was commissioned and conducted between May 16, 2017 and June 13, 2017.[6] Of 1,000 total respondents, support for expanding access to high-quality child care and public pre-k was strong across income, age, gender, race, ethnicity, level of education, and households with and those without young children.

Mecklenburg County Poll
Strong Support for ECE Expansion

Nearly 90% of respondents expressed support for expanding access to high-quality early care and education programs.

Mecklenburg County Residents Support Paying for Early Learning Programs

The poll asked whether respondents would be willing to pay higher taxes to support ECE access. Half of respondents were asked if they would pay $10 more a month in taxes to support ECE and the other half were asked whether they would be willing to pay $20 more a month in taxes.

Willing to Pay $10 More in Taxes Per Month

- **72%** of respondents said they would be willing to pay $10 more in taxes each month to increase access to high-quality child care for young children.
- **71%** of respondents said they would be willing to pay $10 more in taxes each month to support voluntary, universal public pre-k for 4-year-old children.

Willing to Pay $20 More in Taxes Per Month

- **71%** of respondents said they would be willing to pay $20 more in taxes each month to increase access to high-quality child care for young children.
- **65%** of respondents said they would be willing to pay $20 more in taxes each month to support voluntary, universal public pre-k for 4-year-old children.

Between March and August 2017, 12 focus groups were held with key stakeholders (i.e., parents, child care providers, child care teaching staff, child care home providers, employers or business representatives, the higher education community, ECE trainers and technical assistance specialists, and community advocates) to gain further insight into public will and to better understand concerns, experiences, and assets within the community.

Across all focus groups, there was support for expanding access to high-quality child care and voluntary, universal public pre-k. All groups agreed that a strong ECE workforce is critical for high-quality programs, that low pay makes it hard to hire and retain quality staff and fuels high turnover (which adversely affects program quality and undermines a child's need for continuity of care), and that any expansion should include parent engagement strategies.

Child care providers said they had or could create physical capacity to serve additional children through any ECE expansion initiative. It was noted that the current child care workforce would need support (tuition assistance) if expected (or willing) to meet NC Pre-K teacher qualifications (a BA and B-K teacher license) since only 40% of lead teachers (and 17% of assistant teachers) in child care programs currently have an AA in ECE or higher level of education.[7]

Support was also expressed by directors and teaching staff for on-site technical assistance/support to help translate knowledge gained to evidence-based practice. All focus groups expressed strong support for evaluation to ensure continuous quality improvement, accountability, and to promote child development and growth.

Current ECE Landscape

Mecklenburg County has a history of supplementing state resources to support ECE services and to reach additional children beyond state funding. Child Care Resources Inc. (CCRI) was created in 1982 to be the backbone organization for the county's child care system based on a BOCC recommendation that a private, nonprofit organization be established to coordinate child care services, offer an array of supports to child care providers, and administer child care subsidies.[8] Bright Beginnings (a public pre-k program serving 4-year-old children at academic risk) was created by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) superintendent in 1998 and is supplemented through county funding.[9] Most recently, the County FY18 budget included a $6 million increase to reduce the waiting list for child care subsidy.[10]

Current Early Care and Education Need

- 70,716 children in Mecklenburg County are under age 5.[11]
- 51,411 children under age 6 live in families where all adults are working (about 73% of children under age 6 within the county – far higher than the statewide average of 65%).[12]
- 22,107 children under age 5 are eligible for a child care subsidy (working families below 200% of the federal poverty level).[13]

There are three main ECE programs serving children birth to age five:

- Licensed child care serves children birth to age 5 (as well as school-age children through age 12)
- Public pre-k for 4-year-old children who are either academically at risk (Bright Beginnings) or whose families have income below 75% of the state median income (NC Pre-K, operated predominantly within child care centers)
- Head Start and Early Head Start serve children in poverty (Head Start for 3 and 4-year-olds; Early Head Start and Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships for children birth to age 3).

According to Charlotte-Mecklenburg School projections, about 12,000 children annually enter kindergarten.[14] Less than one-third participate in the two public pre-k programs operating in Mecklenburg County to serve 4-year-old children: Bright Beginnings and NC Pre-K.

- 2,800 children are enrolled in Bright Beginnings[15]
- 1,006 children are enrolled in NC Pre-K[16]

The relationship between high-quality child care, public pre-k, Head Start, Early Head Start, and Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships is that each of these programs is an early learning setting. Access currently varies by eligibility criteria (i.e., income or other criteria) and availability of funding.

Mecklenburg County's Youngest Children Current ECE Assistance, Birth to Age 5

Child Care Subsidy	4,164
Bright Beginnings	2,800
NC Pre-K	1,006
Head Start & Early Head Start	600
Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships	203

Sources: Child Care Resources Inc. (CCRI) June 2017, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) June 2017, and Bethlehem Center of Charlotte, June 2017.

Mecklenburg County has a robust infrastructure for ECE delivery and support.

Seventy-eight percent of all children birth to age five enrolled in licensed child care attend higher-quality 4- and 5-star child care programs (with 91% of children whose care is subsidized enrolled in 4-and 5-star programs).[17]

However, child care is expensive, and families with young children struggle to afford it.

Annual Cost of Child Care Center-based Programs in Mecklenburg County

Infants	$11,700
Toddlers	$11,388
2-3 Year-Olds	$10,868
3-4 Year-Olds	$10,452
4-5 Year-Olds	$10,296

Source: Child Care Resources Inc. (CCRI), June 30, 2017

There is simply not enough funding to meet the need.

Only 19% of income-eligible children receive assistance, and there are nearly as many children under age five on the waiting list (3,905) as those who receive assistance (4,164).[18]

Public pre-k (NC Pre-K and Bright Beginnings),[19] Head Start and Early Head Start,[20] and Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships[21] all have waiting lists.

Early Care and Education Waiting Lists In Mecklenburg County

Child Care Subsidy Under Age 5	3,905
Bright Beginnings, 4-year-olds	1,063
NC Pre-K, 4-year-olds	1,892
Head Start and Early Head Start	1,449
Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships	167

* Waiting list numbers cannot be totaled without the possibility of duplicating children who may be on more than one of these lists.

Sources: Child Care Subsidy and EHS-CCP, Child Care Resources Inc. (CCRI); public pre-k, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS); and Head Start and EHS, Bethlehem Center of Charlotte. June 2017. CCRI is currently working to certify eligible families and link them to subsidy to draw down the $6 million in the FY18 County budget.

While ECE waiting list information is a snapshot in time and changes daily, and many families do not even put their children's names on waiting lists due to long wait periods, waiting lists are still a good indication that demand significantly exceeds available funding.

The Pathway Forward

The Executive Committee spent considerable time discussing challenges and opportunities related to accessing high-quality child care and public pre-k. ECE models currently implemented in various communities were discussed. A half-day retreat was held to review challenges facing the ECE workforce and to discuss strategies to build and strengthen the ECE workforce for an expansion of public pre-k classrooms.

While the recommendations in this report will not guarantee access to high-quality ECE programs for all children birth to age five, the Executive Committee believes that the recommendations do provide a significant start toward that end.

The Executive Committee's 5-Point Plan

The Executive Committee's five recommendations represent an integrated strategy to expand ECE programs in a phased-in manner.

Recommendation 1: *Clear the child care subsidy waiting list for children under age five.*

This recommendation promotes:

- Children's healthy development at a time when rapid brain development is forming the foundation for school readiness (and life), and
- Family economic stability linked to parent employment.

Cost: $28.3 million in the first year and carried forward throughout the 6-year period.[22]

Recommendation 2: *Implement a six-year phase-in for voluntary, universal public pre-k for all 4-year-old children, with a sliding fee scale for tuition payments applied to families above 200% of poverty.*

- The first three years would add 812 children each year (in 45 new classrooms each year) to reach all 4-year-old children at or below 200% of poverty, and
- Years 4-6 would add 1,372 children each year (in 76 new classrooms each year) to reach remaining children.

Note: Over the next 6 years, 364 classrooms would be needed.

Recommendation 3: *Implement ECE Workforce Talent Development and Retention strategies to meet ECE workforce needs related to high-quality child care programs and an expansion of public pre-k in child care programs.*

- Pay comparability with CMS teachers for public pre-k teachers with a BA and B-K license in child care centers;
- Annual retention grants of $1,200 for pre-k and birth-to-five child care lead teachers (a pilot subject to evaluation);
- Pay comparability for child care teaching staff with an AA in ECE to the median wage in Mecklenburg County for individuals with an AA degree (a pilot subject to evaluation);
- On-site technical assistance and coaching to support teachers in translating knowledge gained to evidence-based practice; and
- Higher education tuition assistance, tied to classroom performance, for child care teachers who choose to pursue higher education coursework on their own time (a pilot subject to evaluation)

Cost: Recommendations #2 and #3 are interrelated. The integrated cost is $13.4 million in Year 1 rising to $49.1 million in Year 6.

Recommendation 4: *Develop a strong evaluation component tied to ECE investment.*

- External evaluation of program quality, including teacher assessments;
- Internal evaluation including ongoing child assessments using age- and developmentally-appropriate tools to promote healthy child development; and
- Evaluation of pilots

Cost: TBD based on phase-in, identification of assessment tools, and price negotiation.

Recommendation 5: *The Board of County Commissioners should consider a revenue increase, restrict its use to ECE expansion, and subject the expansion initiative to evaluation for continuous quality improvement.*

The Executive Committee reviewed the polling, revenue estimates prepared by the Mecklenburg County Financial Services Department on an array of options, and the distributional impact among those options.

- Counties have a local option to increase the sales tax by one quarter of a penny (Article 46 sales tax, G.S. 105-535)[23] through a County referendum. The ballot cannot stipulate specific uses for the sales tax, however, the County Board of Commissioners could adopt a separate resolution stipulating how the revenue would be used. The Mecklenburg County Financial Services Department estimates that a .25% sales tax increase would yield about $50 million per year.
- The current property tax is .8157 for every $100 of assessed value. An increase of a penny (to .8257 for every $100) would yield $12 million per year. For the average residential property valued at $208,176, an increase of a penny would mean an annual average cost increase of $21 (about $1.75 per month).[24]

A Call to Action

Children are only young once. The science related to brain development and its connection to school success, school performance, high school graduation rates, workforce readiness, and opportunities and future earnings is well established. The return on investment in high-quality ECE programs is also well documented.

The "Chetty" report,[25] which ranked Charlotte 50th out of the nation's 50 largest cities with regard to upward mobility for its youth, wasn't just a warning bell – it was a call to action to ensure that all children, regardless of family income, gender, race, or ethnicity, have equality in economic opportunity.

High-Quality ECE Programs Economic Return on Investment (ROI)

Nobel Laureate economist James Heckman released new research in 2016 that found:

Every dollar spent on high-quality, birth-to-five programs for disadvantaged children delivers a 13% annual return on investment.

Children were not the only beneficiaries – the economic benefits of the additional wages earned by parents with access to high-quality care paid for the cost of the program after five years.

Heckman, J., Garcia, J., Leaf, D., Prados, M., Center for the Economics of Human Development at the University of Chicago. The Life Cycle Benefits of an Influential Early Childhood Program. Working Paper 2016-035. (Dec. 2016). https://heckmanequation.org/assets/2017/01/Garcia_Heckman_Leaf_etal_2016_life-cycle-benefits-ecp_r1-p.pdf

The pathway to economic opportunity is through access to ECE programs to give children from birth to age five the strong start they need to start school ready to learn.

Executive Committee members reviewed revenue options and strongly felt that financing options are within reach for a significant expansion of ECE programs. Public will, as evidenced through the Mecklenburg County poll and focus groups, supports such investments.

As a first step toward ECE access for all children from birth to age five, the Executive Committee recommendations lay out a plan to clear the child care subsidy waiting list for children under age five and to phase-in voluntary, universal public pre-k for all 4-year-old children over a six-year period.

Executive Committee members also feel strongly that this report is only the beginning and look forward to focusing on strategies specifically related to children from birth to age 3, given what the science shows about brain development in a child's earliest years and what evidence-based research shows works for our youngest children.

The time is now. The Executive Committee has outlined a plan and resources, and public will exists to fund it. It is time to move from putting thoughts and recommendations on paper to putting the policies and resources in place to promote economic opportunity for all children within the county.

More detail is available about the current landscape, the components of the plan, and the costs associated with a series of recommendations for a phased-in approach in the following sections of the Executive Committee's full report.

Introduction

Since the release of a national 2013 economic mobility study,[26] which ranked Charlotte 50th out of the nation's 50 largest cities with regard to upward mobility for its youth, there have been several concentrated efforts to identify barriers to economic opportunity within Mecklenburg County.

During the past two years, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Opportunity Task Force[27] convened to review challenges and recommend strategies. Early on, the task force identified access to high-quality early care and education as one of the three key determinants most likely to have the greatest influence on a child's future.[28]

Access to high-quality early care and education programs matters because of what the research shows about early brain development.

A child's first few years of life are critical because more than 1 million new neural connections are formed every second within the brain at this time — setting in place the foundation for all future learning, behavior, and health.[29] Because both experiences and genes shape the developing brain, the settings in which children spend their earliest years can have a long-term impact.[30]

North Carolina has been a national leader in pioneering strategies to support access to high-quality early care and education statewide.

- The state's child care licensing system was created in 1971, moved to a two-tiered minimal quality system (A and AA) in 1986, and evolved to a 5-star rated license in 1999. NC Pre-K (formerly called More at Four) was created in 2001.[31]
- Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agencies (called at the time, Community Coordinated Child Care or 4Cs) were created by the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare in 1968 to assist parents in finding child care and to train child care providers with several of the nation's first agencies located in North Carolina.[32]
- Smart Start and the North Carolina Partnership for Children emanated from state legislation enacted in 1993 and was funded in all 100 counties in 1999 to promote efforts to ensure that every child in North Carolina enters school healthy and ready for success.[33]
- T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood scholarships were offered statewide beginning in 1993 to assist the early care and education workforce in accessing higher education coursework.[34]
- The Child Care WAGE$ program was offered statewide in 1998 to provide a modest increase in wages for higher education levels achieved.[35]

Our Children. Their Future. Our Future.

Access to high-quality early care and education programs gives all children, from birth to age five, the strong start they need in life to realize their full potential, to have economic opportunity, and to make our community prosperous.

Mecklenburg County has a history of supplementing state resources in early care and education to serve more children than would otherwise access high-quality settings through state funding. For example,

- Child Care Resources Inc. (CCRI), a child care resource and referral agency, was created in 1982 to be the backbone organization for the county's child care system based on a BOCC recommendation that a private, nonprofit organization be established to coordinate child care services, offer an array of supports to child care providers, and administer child care subsidies.[36]
- The Bright Beginnings program (serving 4-year-old children at academic risk) was created in school year 1998, by Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) Superintendent, Eric Smith, with supplemental funding from the County Commission.[37]
- For the first time ever, and as a result of BOCC leadership, a resolution was adopted supporting access to birth to age five early education programs and the FY18 County budget increased child care subsidy funding by $6 million for older preschool-age children.[38]

Early Care and Education Definition

In this report, the term *"Early Care and Education (ECE)"* refers to early learning programs for children from birth to age 5. In Mecklenburg County, ECE programs include: licensed child care programs serving children from birth to age 5, NC Pre-K and Bright Beginnings serving 4-year-old children, Head Start (serving 3 and 4-year-old children), and Early Head Start and Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships (serving children birth to age 3).

Building on the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Opportunity Task Force discussions about the connection between brain development, early learning opportunities, and school readiness (and school performance), then County Commission Chairman, Trevor Fuller, in his February 2016 State of the County address, called for an early education initiative within the county to ensure that all children -- from birth to age five -- have access to quality early childhood education that will provide life-long benefits.[39] *"The time has come for us to take bold action to ensure the future prosperity of our county,"* said Fuller.[40]

The Charlotte Executive Leadership Council (CELC), a group of two dozen chief executives and local leaders, contributed $500,000 to the County Commission to support an early childhood education expansion study to review financing options and costs related to a phased-in implementation design.[41]

On December 20, 2016, the County Commission adopted a resolution supporting the study and a phased-in plan for achieving a community vision for access to quality early childhood education for all children in the county from birth to age five.[42]

County Commission Chair, Ella Scarborough, in her February 2017 State of the County address said, *"Access to early childhood education is important to our economy and economic upward mobility. The community's return on investment is immeasurable. I encourage my fellow County Commissioners to continue to support this initiative. Early childhood education provides life-long benefits and continues to make Mecklenburg County a better place to live, work, and play."*[43]

Executive Committee Review

To better understand barriers and opportunities related to expanding early care and education access for all children birth to age five, County Manager Dena Diorio asked a broad array of key stakeholders to join an Executive Committee[44] to:

- conduct a landscape review of current ECE programs;
- review the number of children birth to age five served in ECE programs as well as the number of children birth to age five eligible and unserved;
- identify barriers to accessing quality ECE programs;
- solicit diverse perspectives through focus groups of individuals (e.g., parents, child care directors and owners, the ECE workforce, community colleges, business leaders, and ECE technical assistance specialists);
- review costs and phased-in strategies to expand access to quality ECE programs; and
- identify reliable funding mechanisms to support such an expansion.

The overall vision, aligned with the resolution adopted by the County Commission, was to identify areas of need related to supporting *"early childhood education in Mecklenburg County for all resident children from birth to age five."*

County Resolution, Adopted December 20, 2016

The Executive Committee's work focused on the following topics to explore in greater detail as essential to any ECE expansion initiative:

- access to early care and education,
- the early childhood education workforce,
- evaluation, and
- financing options

Subcommittees were formed on each of the topics with Executive Committee members self-selecting subcommittee participation. Overall, 13 meetings were held, including 4 subcommittee meetings and 3 half-day retreats to review and discuss barriers, challenges, and opportunities within each topic area.

Executive Committee Meetings Held

December 9, 2016

January 20, 2017

March 17, 2017

April 21, 2017

June 13, 2017 (webinar)

August 31, 2017

Subcommittee Meetings Held

February 17

February 28

March 1

March 2

Half-Day Retreats Held

May 1, 2017

May 19, 2017

June 29, 2017

Gathering Community Views

To further gauge community support for expanding access to early childhood education in the county, a poll of county residents was commissioned. The survey was designed to better understand the views and desires of county residents with regard to access to ECE programs, and also to understand the level of public will that exists to support financing an expansion of early childhood education throughout the county.

The poll was conducted using both landline and cell phones between May 16 and June 13, 2017. Participation was restricted to county residents over the age of 18 and respondents varied by gender, age, race, ethnicity, level of education, income, households with and without children and whether households included children under age 6. The sample was weighted to be demographically representative of the county and has an overall margin of error for the full sample of 1,000 of +/- 3%.[45]

Mecklenburg County Poll: Strong Support for Early Education Expansion

Throughout the county, there is broad understanding (across age, gender, income, level of education, family status - with or without young children, race, ethnicity, and political affiliation) that early learning programs (such as high-quality child care and public pre-k) better prepare children to enter school ready to learn, and have a major impact on a child's success in school, future development, and long-term well-being.

Nearly 90% of respondents expressed support for expanding access to high-quality early care and education programs.

More than two-thirds of respondents said they would support paying an extra $10 or $20 per month in taxes to increase access to high-quality child care and voluntary, universal public pre-k for 4-year-old children.

Key Mecklenburg County Poll Findings

Mecklenburg County Residents Support Expanding Access to High-Quality Early Learning Programs

- **88%** of respondents support increasing access to high-quality child care for children from birth to age 5 (with 69% expressing strong support).
- **89%** of respondents support increasing access to high-quality voluntary, public pre-k for 4-year-old children (with 76% expressing strong support).

Mecklenburg County Residents Support Paying for Early Learning Programs

Willing to Pay $10 More in Taxes Per Month

- **72%** of respondents said they would be willing to pay $10 more in taxes each month to increase access to high-quality child care for young children.
- **71%** of respondents said they would be willing to pay $10 more in taxes each month to support voluntary, public pre-k for 4-year-old children.

Willing to Pay $20 More in Taxes Per Month

- **71%** of respondents said they would be willing to pay $20 more in taxes each month to increase access to high-quality child care for young children.
- **65%** of respondents said they would be willing to pay $20 more in taxes each month to support voluntary, public pre-k for 4-year-old children.

Mecklenburg County Residents Support the Early Care and Education Workforce

- **91%** of respondents agree that the key to providing high-quality child care is a teaching workforce that has the necessary education and training (with 71% expressing strong support).
- **93%** of respondents agree that the key to providing high-quality public pre-k is a teaching workforce that has the necessary education and training (with 70% expressing strong support).

Focus Groups Held to Gain Further Insight & Perspectives

To better understand concerns, experiences, and assets within the community and to identify issues to explore, 12 focus groups were held among specific stakeholders.

Focus Groups Held

March 25, 2017: Child Care Center Directors & Owners

March 30, 2017: Faith-based Providers

March 30, 2017: Higher Education Community

March 30, 2017: Parents of Young Children

March 31, 2017: Community Advocates

April 27 & June 30, 2017: Business Leaders

April 27, 2017: Home Child Care Providers

April 28 & June 19, 2017: Hispanic Parents of Young Children (conducted in Spanish)

August 14, 2017: ECE Technical Assistance Specialists

August 31, 2017: ECE Lead Teachers and Assistant Teachers

Across all focus groups, there was support for expanding access to high-quality child care for children birth to age five and implementation of a voluntary, universal public pre-K program for 4-year-old children. There was also agreement on the following:

High-Quality

High-quality child care means children are safe and learning; child care is both a work support for parents and an early education setting for children; and child care is difficult for many families to afford.

- High-quality ECE programs have teachers with the knowledge and skills that they need, which includes the ability to translate that knowledge into classroom approaches to meet the individual needs of children.
- Any expansion of ECE programs within Mecklenburg County should be of high-quality.

Teacher Pay

Low teacher pay was identified as a specific challenge affecting (a) the ability to hire and retain high-quality staff, (b) interest in ECE as a field generally, and pursuit of higher education coursework (i.e., the field pays such low wages that there is less interest in pursuing higher education ECE coursework; low pay inhibits the ability of the current workforce to afford higher education), and (c) turnover, which adversely impacts the continuity of children's care, program quality, and children's healthy development.

Evaluation

Evaluation is important to ensure that programs are working as intended and to enable continuous quality improvement. Teachers and children should be assessed and any evaluation of children must be age- and developmentally-appropriate.

Parent Engagement

Strategies to engage parents are critical to promote children's learning (e.g., reading to children and talking with children during everyday tasks such as grocery shopping), and to provide information to families about child development and community resources.

Higher Taxes

Focus group participants were willing to pay higher taxes if those taxes are restricted to ECE investments.

Views by Focus Groups

Parents

In focus groups with parents, there was broad understanding that both child care and public pre-k are early learning settings. Parents know that children learn from birth and that the birth to age three period is a time of rapid brain development. They want access to quality child care programs for their children and they are strongly supportive of voluntary, universal, public pre-k.

Parents want to feel connected to the programs and be offered ways to support their children's learning. In addition, Hispanic parents expressed strong support for children learning in Spanish and English. They also expressed a need for more ECE information, specifically information available in Spanish.

Parent Thoughts

"Parents want the best for their children…We want the state and local government agencies to make sure that regardless of the establishment, all are held to a standard that is supportive of getting kids school ready."

"Why can New York, Chicago, and DC have preschool for all children, but not us?"

Parent Focus Groups, March 30 and June 19, 2017.

Employers

In focus groups with employers, business leaders understood that investments in ECE programs help parents work and children learn. They anticipate that investing in early learning settings will increase school readiness and result in a return on investment through reduced costs related to children repeating a year in school. They believe that children who start school ready to learn are more likely to graduate high school either college or career ready, and therefore, investing in early care and education will likely lead to increases in the high school graduation rate and lifetime earnings. Business leaders were interested in ongoing evaluation of programs to ensure that the needs of children are being met and to make refinement in teacher approaches where necessary.

Employer Thoughts

"Data is important. Measurement is important. Teachers are at the core. How do you attract, develop and retain a quality workforce? If we can address that core issue, some of these other things could take care of themselves."

"I know I've lost good employees due to child care. And, I've lost lower paid employees due to child care."

Business Leader focus groups, April 27 and June 30, 2017

Child Care Directors and Owners

In focus groups with child care directors and owners, providers shared their on-the-ground experiences in offering child care for children birth to age five and the NC Pre-K program, which serves low-income 4-year-olds in the county. Overwhelmingly, providers felt they had or could create capacity to serve additional children should the county decide to provide funding to assist children on the child care subsidy waiting list and to expand public pre-k. Providers talked about the challenge of trying to keep fees low so that they are affordable for parents while also collecting sufficient revenue through tuition fees to hire and retain qualified staff. There was agreement that on-site technical assistance helps promote program stability, more effective interactions with children, and classroom management.

Community Advocates

In a focus group with community advocates, insight was shared about the broad array of issues that families face in accessing quality child care in order for parents to work, as well about public pre-k access. There was agreement that any ECE initiative should be of high quality, focus on all children, be phased in, involve a family engagement component, and provide training to promote cultural competency and reduce implicit bias (i.e., racism).

Higher Education

In a focus group with the higher education community, Central Piedmont Community College (CPCC) and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte representatives shared their experiences and perceptions about the struggles of the ECE workforce, which typically earn low wages leading to life stressors that can undermine the quality of care. Barriers to accessing (and completing) an AA course load at CPCC and the BA B-K license at UNC Charlotte were discussed in an effort to ensure that recommendations reflect workplace and workforce realities that will support an expansion of ECE programs (including ways to train, recruit, and retain bilingual teachers).

ECE Technical Assistance (TA) Specialists

In a focus group with ECE TA Specialists, Child Care Resources Inc. (CCRI) staff shared their experiences and perceptions in their work with ECE programs (challenges facing both directors and classroom teachers). TA staff were in agreement that support is customized to the individual needs of a program director or classroom teacher or both. For example, TA specialists assist programs with strategies and best practices to help maintain or increase star ratings and to address specific challenges faced by directors (such as business, human resource issues, or management issues) and teachers (such as translating knowledge to effective classroom strategies, classroom management, child-adult interaction, or specific strategies to address a child's challenging behavior). Additionally, licensing specialists refer program directors to ECE TA specialists for specific types of technical assistance when they identify issues of concern during a monitoring visit.

ECE Workforce (Lead Teachers and Assistant Teachers)

In a focus group with ECE teachers and assistant teachers, there was consensus that high-quality child care involves teachers who have a passion for working with children, low child to staff ratios, and sufficient materials so that they don't have to personally supplement classroom needs. Teachers cited low pay as the top reason for high turnover within the field (followed closely by lack of health insurance, paid sick time, and retirement options – as benefits vary by program with many centers not offering benefits). Teachers also expressed support for on-site technical assistance to assist with strategies to address children with challenging behaviors (and also their parents so that strategies used in the classroom could also be used at home). Overall, teachers want to feel valued, appreciated, and supported in their work with young children.

Pathway Forward

Over a nine-month period, the Executive Committee reviewed the ECE landscape; access to ECE programs for children from birth to age five; challenges, barriers, and costs involved with expanding access to high-quality ECE programs for all children under age 5 in the county; and developed recommendations to significantly expand access to ECE programs over the next six years, creating a pathway forward to reach all children birth to age five.

As a first step toward ECE access for all young children, the Executive Committee recommendations lay out a six-year plan to clear the child care subsidy waiting list for children under age five and to phase in public pre-k for all 4-year-old children.

Executive Committee members also feel strongly that this report is only the beginning and look forward to focusing also on strategies specifically related to children from birth to age 3, given what the science shows about brain development in a child's earliest years and what evidence-based research shows works for our youngest children.

Children are only young once. The Executive Committee urges action now.

Current ECE Landscape

Children Under Age 5 in Mecklenburg County

- **70,716** children in Mecklenburg County are under age 5.[46]
- **51,411** children are under age 6 and live in families where all adults are working[47] (about 73% of children[48] under age 6 within the county – far higher than the statewide average of 65%[49]).

On any given day, these children may need some type of child care to ensure that their parents can work to provide economic support for their families.

- **22,107** children under age 5 are eligible for a child care subsidy (working families below 200% of the federal poverty level).[50]
- **4,164** children under age 5 actually receive a child care subsidy (19% of eligible children)[51]
- **3,905** children under age 5, including some 5-year-olds who are not yet in school, are on a child care subsidy waiting list for assistance.[52]

According to Charlotte-Mecklenburg School projections, about 12,000 children annually enter kindergarten.[53] Less than one-third participate in the two public pre-k programs operating in Mecklenburg County to serve 4-year-old children: Bright Beginnings and NC Pre-K.

- **2,800** children are enrolled in Bright Beginnings[54]
- **1,006** children are enrolled in NC Pre-K[55]

Early Care and Education Programs

There are three main early care and education programs within Mecklenburg County that support children from birth to age five.

- Licensed child care serves children birth to age 5 (as well as school-age children through age 12)
- Public pre-k for 4-year-old children who are either academically at risk (Bright Beginnings) or low-income below 75% of state median income (NC Pre-K, operated predominantly within child care centers)
- Head Start and Early Head Start serve children in poverty (Head Start for 3 and 4-year-olds; Early Head Start and Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships for children birth to age 3)

The relationship between high-quality child care, public pre-k, Head Start, Early Head Start and Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships is that each of these programs is an early learning setting. Access currently varies by eligibility criteria (i.e., income or other criteria) and availability of funding.

Children with special needs can be served in all of the above programs through services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which in North Carolina is referred to as the Exceptional Children program.[56] Under federal law, early intervention services[57] for children from birth to age 3 and preschool services[58] for children age 3-5, are provided in *"the least restrictive environment,"* which means that a child could receive services at home, in licensed child care, in Head Start, in public pre-k, or other settings. In 2016-2017, 1,751 children age 3-5 received EC funded services.[59]

Mecklenburg County Child Care Centers (Serving Children from Birth to Age 5)
Regulated Child Care Centers = 364

License Type	Number of Programs	Percent of Programs	Number of Slots	Percent of Slots
1 Star	13	3.57%	1,206	5.12%
2 Stars	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
3 Stars	45	12.36%	1,597	6.78%
4 Stars	108	29.67%	6,395	27.14%
5 Stars	163	44.78%	11,974	50.82%
Subtotals	329	90.38%	21,172	89.85%
GS 110-106	23	6.32%	1,794	7.61%
Temporary	8	2.20%	310	1.32%
Provisional	3	0.82%	217	0.92%
Probationary	1	0.27%	70	0.30%
Totals	364	100.00%	23,563	100.00%

Percentage totals are rounded to 100%
Source: Child Care Resources Inc. (CCRI), June 2017

Mecklenburg County Family Child Care Homes (Serving Children From Birth through 12 Years of Age) Regulated Family Child Care Homes = 183				
License Type	Number of Programs	Percent of Programs	Number of Slots	Percent of Slots
1 Star	25	13.66%	200	13.98%
2 Stars	20	10.93%	148	10.34%
3 Stars	42	22.95%	327	22.85%
4 Stars	62	33.88%	493	34.45%
5 Stars	33	18.03%	255	17.82%
Subtotals	182	99.45%	1,423	99.44%
GS 110-106	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Temporary	1	0.55%	8	0.56%
Provisional	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Probationary	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Totals	183	100.00%	1,431	100.00%

Percentage totals are rounded to 100%
Source: Child Care Resources Inc. (CCRI), June 2017

Child Care

Licensed child care in North Carolina is rated on a 5-star scale (e.g., one star means a program meets minimum licensing requirements and two to five stars means that a program voluntarily meets higher requirements such as staff qualifications and program standards).[60] Parents pay a fee for children to attend.

As of June 30, 2017, there were 364 regulated child care centers and 183 regulated child care homes in Mecklenburg County.

In June 2017, 19,516 children under age 5 were enrolled in some form of licensed child care.

Child care programs have the capacity to serve more children.

Mecklenburg County Licensed Child Care Capacity Birth to Age 5

Licensed capacity	24,994 slots
Desired capacity	24,535 slots
Enrollment (78% of licensed capacity; 80% of desired capacity)	19,516
Available slots (22% of licensed capacity; 20% of desired capacity)	5,478

Source: Child Care Resources Inc. (CCRI), June 2017

Mecklenburg - Enrollment in Licensed Programs Children Enrolled, June 30, 2017				
Ages	CCC	FCCH	Total	Percent
Under 1	1,609	86	1,695	6%
1	2,936	173	3,109	11%
2	3,339	206	3,545	12%
3	3,835	143	3,978	14%
4	4,599	90	4,689	16%
5PS*	2,468	32	2,500	9%
Total Birth-5PS*	18,786	730	19,516	67%
School-Age	9,447	187	9,634	33%
Total Birth-12	28,233	917	29,150	100%

Note: Children in regulated center-based care is abbreviated "CCC" and children in regulated home-based care is abbreviated "FCCH."
* Children "5 PS" means children who are age 5 who are not yet enrolled in kindergarten.
Source: Child Care Resources Inc. (CCRI), June 2017

For many parents, affording child care is a struggle. The average annual cost of center-based care for an infant is $11,700; the average annual cost of center-based care for a preschool-age child is $10,452.[61] About 22,107 children under age five are eligible for a child care subsidy – their families are working and earn wages at or below 200% of the federal poverty level (about $40,840 for a family of three).[62]

Annual Cost of Child Care
Center-based Programs in Mecklenburg County

Infants	$11,700
Toddlers	$11,388
2-3 Year-Olds	$10,868
3-4 Year-Olds	$10,452
4-5 Year-Olds	$10,296

Source: Child Care Resources Inc. (CCRI), June 30, 2017

Parents receive child care assistance based on family income and work/school participation requirements, and are required to make a co-payment equal to 10% of their income. However, funding is limited and, therefore, only a small percentage of eligible children receive a child care subsidy.

- 4,164 (19%) of eligible children receive assistance.[63]
- 3,905 children[64] under age five are on the waiting list for child care subsidy.[65]

What this means is that a family of 3 with income at or below 200% of the federal poverty level would pay at least 28.6% of their income for center-based infant care and at least 54.2% of their income for center-based care for two children (an infant and a preschool-age child). Families with young children generally earn lower wages than families with older children because they tend to be younger, have spent less time in the labor force, and therefore are at their early earning years in their careers.

The reality is that without financial assistance, it is difficult for families to access early care and education for their children. This is a concern because child care has a dual purpose: it is a work support for parents to enable them to financially provide for their families and it is also an early learning setting for children.

Mecklenburg County Child Care Costs in Context

- **More than College:** The annual cost of center-based infant care is $5,500 more than the annual cost of tuition and fees at NC's 4-year public universities. *($11,700 per year for center-based infant care; $7,200 per year for tuition and fees at NC's public universities)*
- **5 Year Cost:** The cumulative annual cost of child care in Mecklenburg County for one child from birth to age five is $54,704.

Source: Child Care Resources Inc. (CCRI), June 2017 and the U.S. College Board, Trends in Higher Education, 2016-2017 State tuition and fees.

The cost of child care is related to many factors. The largest cost component is staffing (wages and required ratios of adults to children to ensure appropriate supervision and effective interaction to promote learning), followed by other items such as rent/mortgage, materials and equipment, food, utilities, maintenance, etc. Understanding that the cost of child care is a struggle for parents, many child care programs pay the lowest wages possible in an effort to keep fees affordable for families. Low wages, however, make it difficult

Licensed Child Care Program Enrollment Birth to Age 5 (Private Pay and Subsidy Receiving)

Children (Ages Birth-5) Enrolled by Type of Care	All Children (Ages Birth-5)	Private Pay Children (Ages Birth-5)	Children Receiving Subsidy (Ages Birth-5)
All Child Care	19,516	15,352	4,164
Faith Exempt (GS110) Child Care	1,554	1,537	17
	8%	10%	0.4%
Temporary, Provisional, Probationary, 1- Star, or 2-Star Child Care	1,466	1,457	9
	8%	9%	0.22%
3-, 4-, & 5-Star Child Care	16,496	12,358	4,138
	85%	80%	99%
4- & 5-Star Child Care	15,312	11,523	3,789
	78%	75%	91%

Source: Child Care Resources Inc. (CCRI), June 2017

to hire and retain quality staff necessary to operate a high-quality program. In addition, low wages contribute to turnover, which adversely impacts program quality.

While child care programs are dependent on tuition fees for their operating budgets, maintaining affordable fees for parents can make it more difficult to operate high-quality programs because there is a gap between what parents can pay and the costs related to operating a high-quality program.

This leads to a system that is under-financed: (1) parents can't afford to pay the cost of high-quality care, and (2) subsidy funding is insufficient to meet the demand for assistance. As a result, many individual programs are under-financed to maintain high-quality operations on an ongoing basis (e.g., star ratings are assessed every three years; quality operations may vary greatly during the intervening time).[66]

For FY2017, about $46.9 million was available for child care subsidy ($41.3 million in federal funds, $5 million in Smart Start funds, and $474,411 from the Charlotte Housing Authority).[67] In June of 2017, the Mecklenburg County Commission approved $6 million to assist young children on the child care subsidy waiting list.[68] CCRI is currently working to certify family eligibility and link families to assistance.

Child care assistance enables parents to work and children to learn.

91% of children receiving a child care subsidy in Mecklenburg County are enrolled in 4- or 5-star programs.

Source: Child Care Resources Inc. (CCRI), June 30, 2017

Head Start and Early Head Start

Head Start is a federally-funded program that allocates funding to grantees within communities to support the healthy development of low-income children (targeted to families at or below the poverty level) from birth to age five.[69] Programs must meet comprehensive federal standards[70] with regard to early learning, health and nutrition, and family well-being (e.g., family engagement). In Mecklenburg County, the Head Start grantee overseeing six Head Start and Early Head Start (EHS) sites is Bethlehem Center of Charlotte.[71] Currently, 600 children from birth to age five receive Head Start services in Mecklenburg County -- 44 infants and toddlers receive EHS services (birth to age 3) and 54 out of 327 4-year-olds are in Head Start classrooms participating in NC Pre-K. The Bethlehem Center Head Start and Early Head Start waiting list includes 1,449 children under age 5.[72]

While the federal Head Start program began in 1965, the *Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership* (EHS-CCP) program was created by Congress in 2015.[73] CCRI was awarded one of the largest grants in the country[74] in 2016, which provides funding to serve 203 children from birth to age 3 in Mecklenburg County. The program is full-day, full-year and meets Early Head Start standards (far more comprehensive than the state's star rated license) through a partnership with child care centers. The goal of the new program is to combine EHS funding with child care subsidy funding to offer high-quality child care programs with comprehensive services for families in poverty with young children receiving a child care subsidy.[75] The program currently has a waiting list of 167 children.

As required under federal law, at least 10 percent of children served in Head Start, Early Head Start, and Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership programs must have identified disabilities.

Public Pre-K

In Mecklenburg County, CMS oversees two public pre-k programs for 4-year-old children. While children of the same age are served, the target population to participate differs.

Bright Beginnings is a free public pre-k program for 4-year-old children in Mecklenburg County who are screened in and demonstrate educational need *(i.e., children who score below their peers on aspects of cognitive, developmental, and/or pre-academic functioning)*, which puts them at risk of not being ready for kindergarten.[76] Bright Beginnings serves 2,800 children and is funded at $22.3 million (about $12.6 million in federal Title I funds and $9.6 million in county funding). About 165 children are on the waiting list (with another 898 on the waiting list who are dually eligible for both Bright Beginnings and NC Pre-K).[77]

NC Pre-K is a free public pre-k program for 4-year-old children primarily in families with income at or below 75% of state median income. Up to 20% of age-eligible children with higher family income may participate in certain circumstances (i.e., dual language learners, identified disability, chronic health condition, educational need identified through a developmental screening, or a family's active duty military status).[78] NC Pre-K operates statewide. In Mecklenburg County, 1,006 children participate, funded at $9.09 million (about $8.5 million through state and CMS funding as well as $500,000 from Smart Start of Mecklenburg County). Most NC Pre-K classrooms are housed in licensed high-quality child care centers. About 1,892 children are on the waiting list.[79]

Children may be dually eligible for Bright Beginnings and NC Pre-K. Both programs use the same curriculum and have the same teacher qualifications.

ECE waiting list information is a snapshot in time. Families eligible for multiple programs may be on one or several waiting lists for programs. Waiting lists cannot be totaled, but they are a good indication of demand significantly exceeding available funding asistance.

Early Care and Education Waiting Lists In Mecklenburg County

Child Care Subsidy Under Age 5:	3,905
Bright Beginnings (4-year-olds):	1,063
NC Pre-K (4-year-olds):	1,892
Head Start and Early Head Start:	1,449
Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership (Birth to 3-year-olds):	167

NOTE: Waiting list numbers cannot be totaled without the possibility of duplicating children who are on more than one of these lists.
Sources:
Child Care Subsidy & Early Head Start Child Care Partnership: Child Care Resources Inc.
Early Head Start and Head Start: Bethlehem Center
Bright Beginnings and NC Pre-K: Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools
CCRI is currently working to certify eligible families and link them to subsidy to draw down the $6 million in the FY18 County budget.
June 2017 Data

Landscape: Additional Supports for High-Quality Early Care and Education Programs

Child Care Resources Inc. (CCRI), a private, nonprofit child care resource and referral agency, partners with the state, county, United Way of Central Carolinas, and the private sector to serve as the infrastructure to: a) assist families across the economic spectrum to find child care and provide consumer education to help families learn about the importance of quality early learning settings and what to look for when choosing child care; b) administer Mecklenburg County's child care subsidy program; c) advance the ECE workforce (child care, Head Start, Early Head Start, public pre-k, and before and after school programs) by providing training and site-based consultation, coaching and technical assistance; and d) collect, analyze, and report on the ECE system's demographics, trends, strengths and gaps in Mecklenburg County and the region to inform community planning and policy development. Additionally, CCRI provides statewide services and co-leads North Carolina's child care resource and referral system under contract to the NC Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE).

Central Piedmont Community College (CPCC) offers a variety of programs to support the ECE workforce. CPCC offers the Associate of Applied Science in Early Childhood, consisting of 70 credit hours, that prepares teachers to work as a lead teacher in a child care classroom; an assistant teacher in NC Pre-K, Head Start, or Early Head Start classrooms; and/or for transfer to one of the 4-year colleges and universities where the ECE department currently has articulation agreements. Current articulation agreements include: UNC Charlotte, UNC Greensboro, Catawba College, Belmont Abbey College, NC Central University, and East Carolina University. A number of certificates are also offered. Certificates are often the first step that students take at CPCC before embarking on degree completion.

- The Early Childhood Certificate (16 credit hours) prepares students to begin working in preschool classrooms with children ages 3-5.
- The Infant/Toddler Care Certificate (16 credit hours) prepares students to begin working in infant and toddler classrooms with children ages 0-3.
- The School-Age Care Certificate (17 credit hours) prepares students to work in school-age settings, such as after-school programs.
- The Human Services Technology w/Specialization in Children w/Exceptionalities Certificate (17 credit hours) prepares students with an understanding of family dynamics and the unique needs of children with special needs.
- The Early Childhood Administration Certificate (16 credit hours) prepares students with the information regarding the unique role of the child care center administrator, the unique needs of families with young children, and specific information about how to operate a child care

facility. Completion of this certificate meets requirements from NC DCDEE for the NC Early Childhood Administrator Credential to become a Level 1 Administrator.

In addition to the AAS degree and various certificates, CPCC provides EDU 119, Introduction to Early Childhood Education, the credentialing course required by NC DCDEE for lead teachers.[80]

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNC Charlotte) offers four programs in the Child and Family Development Program.

- The Bachelor of Arts in Child and Family Development program prepares graduates to work in educational and related settings that serve infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and kindergartners with and without disabilities, and their families. Students who have completed the program receive the North Carolina license in Birth-Kindergarten (B-K) education. The students are accepted as cohorts in a full-time 120 credit hour degree program.
- The Graduate Certificate in Child and Family Development program is 27 credit hours and is designed for prospective students already working in professional settings who wish to pursue a License in Birth-Kindergarten (B-K) on a part-time basis.
- The Master of Arts in Teaching (M.A.T.) program offers a master's degree to students who have completed the Graduate Certificate in Child and Family Development and take 12 additional graduate credit hours.
- The Master of Education (M.Ed.) in Child and Family Studies program is 33 credit hours and is designed for prospective students who wish to seek research and evaluation expertise in child and family studies and community leadership in child and family programs.[81]

Smart Start of Mecklenburg County administers primarily state and some private funds to programs to support initiatives serving children from birth to age 5 and their families under three primary categories: child health, family support, and early childhood education.[82] Smart Start funding supports: child care subsidy, part-day preschool, NC Pre-K, child care quality improvement initiatives, ECE teacher supports, early literacy initiatives, parenting education, and support for children with special needs. In total, in FY2016-FY2017, Smart Start allocated $13 million to support community initiatives to assist families with young children.[83]

Read Charlotte is a community initiative that supports a broad array of literacy strategies designed to improve children's literacy from birth to third grade with a goal of doubling reading proficiency in third grade (from 39% to 80%) by 2025. Some of Read Charlotte's strategies are targeted to children from birth to age 5. For example, Read Charlotte supports Ready4K - a text message curriculum for parents and caregivers of children from birth to age 5;[84] Reach Out and Read – currently in 13 health clinics throughout Mecklenburg County to encourage parents to read with young children;[85] and Ready to Read, a program that stacks and aligns evidence-based interventions with the Raising a Reader program.[86]

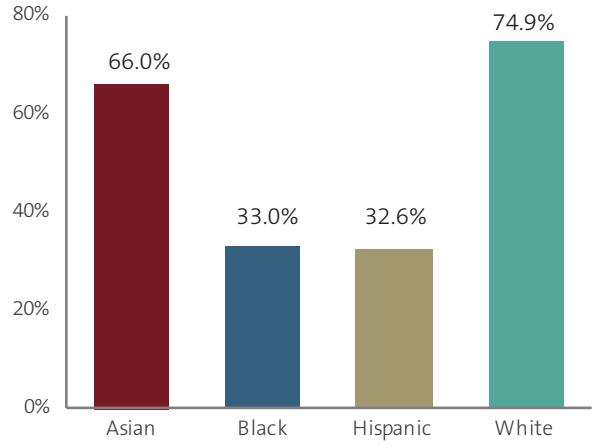
Expanding Access to High-Quality Child Care

The majority of children in Mecklenburg County live in households where all available parents are working. Therefore, for many of these children, child care settings are key to their development. Studies show that children with employed mothers spend about 36 hours per week in some form of child care.[87]

In Mecklenburg County, because only 19% of children under age 5 eligible for a subsidy actually receive assistance, the vast majority of eligible children live in families that cannot afford licensed child care. This matters because early learning settings are linked to school readiness and school readiness is linked to 3rd grade reading proficiency.

The Executive Committee reviewed data about the number of students who are retained in third grade due to low reading skills (and related costs to educate these children for another year) as well as the percentage of students who fail to meet grade level expectations on the Charlotte-Mecklenburg end-of-year tests for third-eighth grade in both English and math. Differences by race on end-of-grade reading and math assessments show deep chasms with a 42.3% gap between white and Hispanic students and a 41.9% gap between white and black students in reading; and, a 43.9% gap between white and black students and a 35.6% gap between white and Hispanic students in math.[88]

2015-2016 Reading Results, Grades 3-8
% of Students Scoring Level IV (College & Career Ready)



Source: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) Budget Book, 2017-2018

When kindergarten teachers are asked about what skills they feel are most important for school readiness, overwhelmingly, skills related to self-regulation and social interaction are at the top of the list.[89]

The skills most frequently listed by 80% or more of kindergarten teachers as most important are that a child: can follow directions, is not disruptive, takes turns and shares, can sit still and pay attention, and communicates verbally.[90] In short, social and emotional development is foundational to learning and academic success.

Studies related to state and local pre-k child outcomes point to the importance of the settings children are in and the experiences they have *before* pre-k, as key to gains made *during* pre-k.[91]

High-Quality ECE Programs
Economic Return on Investment (ROI)

Nobel Laureate economist James Heckman released new research in 2016 that found:

- Every dollar spent on high-quality, birth-to-five programs for disadvantaged children delivers a 13% annual return on investment.
- Children were not the only beneficiaries – the economic benefits of the additional wages earned by parents with access to high-quality care paid for the cost of the program after five years.

Heckman, J., Garcia, J., Leaf, D., Prados, M., Center for the Economics of Human Development at the University of Chicago. The Life Cycle Benefits of an Influential Early Childhood Program. Working Paper 2016-035. (Dec. 2016). https://heckmanequation.org/assets/2017/01/Garcia_Heckman_Leaf_etal_2016_life-cycle-benefits-ecp_r1-p.pdf

High-quality child care from birth to age 5 offers children a setting that promotes their healthy development and school readiness through nurturing interactions with teachers.

In North Carolina, child care subsidies are restricted to settings with a 3-, 4-, or 5- star rating. In Mecklenburg County, 91% of all subsidized children receive care in 4- or 5- star programs.[92]

Enrollment of Children Receiving Child Care Subsidy By Child Age and Child Care Star Level							
Ages	GS-110	1-Star	2-Star	3-Star	4-Star	5-Star	Total
Infants & Toddlers (0-3)	3	4	0	160	681	962	1,810 26.35%
Preschoolers (3-5)	14	5	0	189	815	1,331	2,354 34.3%
School-Agers (5/6-12)	11	9	0	160	929	1,595	2,704 39.37%
Total	28	18	0	509	2,425	3,888	6,868

Source: Child Care Resources Inc. (CCRI), June 2017

Focus group meetings were particularly helpful in understanding what parents want for their children in a child care setting and how, too often, it is simply not affordable. Throughout the county, thousands of young children with working parents are on a waiting list for help affording licensed child care.

Many of these children are in informal arrangements that may not support a learning environment and can also be unreliable. This not only affects a parent's ability to work but also may impede a child's development.

Executive Committee members agreed that expanding access to early care and education begins with clearing the child care subsidy waiting list for children birth to age five so that children can have the strong start they need during their earliest years. Providing support for children on the child care subsidy waiting list will:

- Promote family economic stability linked to parent employment, and
- Promote the healthy development of children at a time when rapid brain development is forming the foundation for school readiness.

Child Care Access Recommendations

Short-term (2018-2019)

Clear the current child care subsidy waiting list for children birth to age five. The cost to clear the current child care subsidy waiting list for all 3,905 children under age five is $28.3 million.[93]

Ongoing

Monitor the child care subsidy waiting list and report semi-annually to the County Commission about the number of children who are eligible for subsidy but who remain unserved on the waiting list.

Long-term vision

Guarantee child care assistance with fees based on income for all working families at or below 200% of FPL with children under age five.

Expanding Access to Voluntary, Universal, Public Pre-K

The Executive Committee spent considerable time discussing challenges and opportunities related to expanding access to voluntary, universal public pre-k for all 4-year-old children in the county.

Across the 12 focus groups, there was strong support for an expansion of public pre-k for 4-year-olds. Child care providers urged that any expansion of pre-k occur within child care programs. Child care providers felt they either had the capacity to offer pre-k classrooms or could create it. At the same time, providers urged a review of public financing for the current NC Pre-K model so that adequate funding is provided for both bus transportation for children who need it and pay for classroom teachers is aligned with the public school system.

The Executive Committee reviewed the financing model used within the county for NC Pre-K. Compared to other counties, the NC Pre-K program as administered in Mecklenburg County, pays more generous rates for child care centers operating NC Pre-K classrooms. However, the program is still under-funded.

Underfunding in 2016-2017 Led to Difficult Decisions

The NC Pre-K Program is administered by the NC Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE). Each county (or region) that participates in the NC Pre-K Program is required to have a NC Pre-K Committee, chaired by the local school superintendent (or designee) and the board chair (or designee) for the local Smart Start Partnership, to oversee the program.[94] Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) is the administrator for NC Pre-K.

DCDEE allocates $650 per month per child and encourages counties to supplement funding to provide lead teachers and teacher assistants with compensation and benefits commensurate with compensation provided in local public school settings.[95] DCDEE does not provide specific funding for transportation.

Child care centers under contract to CMS (as NC Pre-K administrator in Mecklenburg County) that house NC Pre-K classrooms are paid a base rate per child and a supplemental payment (a differential for such items as transportation, teacher/teacher assistant pay -- based on level of education and experience, health/life insurance and retirement costs). The per child payment per month to child care centers operating a NC Pre-K classroom is $771 per child within Mecklenburg County compared to $650 per child as allocated by DCDEE in most counties.[96]

In past years, this policy has enabled Mecklenburg County NC Pre-K to pay reimbursement for teacher salaries in a manner comparable to public school salaries *(i.e., paying public pre-k teachers with the same qualifications comparably regardless of whether they work in Bright Beginnings (a school-based program) or NC Pre-K (primarily pre-k classrooms in private child care centers))*. In 2016, the NC state budget included a 3% raise for public school teachers but did not increase per child payments for NC Pre-K. A difficult decision was made by the county's NC Pre-K Committee to eliminate transportation funding in order to pay teachers comparably.[97]

In focus group discussions, parents and child care providers expressed support for bus service for those children who need it in order to attend the NC Pre-K program.

Attendance matters for learning and for some families, transportation is a barrier to attendance. While attendance has not been widely studied, several city-wide preschool evaluations show that children are more likely to enter kindergarten ready to learn when they have attended preschool regularly.

A 2014 Chicago study found that across all students, the more days of preschool that a student missed at age 4, the lower his or her school readiness scores were for math, letter recognition, and social-emotional development.[98] Regardless of incoming skills, children with more absences completed the year with lower social-emotional development scores.[99]

Head Start, EHS, and EHS-CCP federal regulations require a transportation plan to ensure that children can access programs. Bus transportation is an allowable expense out of Head Start, EHS, and EHS-CCP program funds.[100]

Public Pre-K Expansion Challenges

Classroom Staffing Capacity

CMS estimates about 12,000[101] 4-year-old children enter kindergarten each year. Of these children, about 3,806 are currently served in NC Pre-K or Bright Beginnings.[102]

- To offer voluntary, universal public pre-k to all 4-year-old children who currently are not receiving services through Bright Beginnings or NC Pre-K, 455 classrooms would be needed to serve an additional 8,194 children.

2016-2017 Universe of Entering Kindergarten Students vs. Students Enrolled in Public Pre-K	
Universe of children annually entering kindergarten	**12,000**
Children currently served in Bright Beginnings or NC Pre-K	3,806
Children not served in public pre-K	8,194
Public pre-K classrooms needed @18 children per class	455
Total	6,868

Source: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS), June 2017

Assuming the parents of 80% of all 4-year-old children will choose to voluntarily enroll their children in public pre-k,[103] about 364 additional classrooms would be needed to serve 6,555 additional children.

2016-2017 Universe of Entering Kindergarten Students @ 80% Participation	
Universe of children annually entering kindergarten	**12,000**
Children not served in public pre-K	8,194
80% child participation (parent choice)	6,555
Public pre-k classrooms needed @18 children per class	364

Source: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS), June 2017

In addition to any turnover within the current Bright Beginnings and NC Pre-K teaching staff (currently operating in 236 classrooms), an additional 364 lead teachers and 364 assistant teachers would be needed.

In 2015-2016, about 30 students graduated UNC Charlotte with a BA and B-K license, the requirement for lead teachers in a NC Pre-K classroom.[104] Ramping up a qualified teacher pool for voluntary, universal public pre-k will require multiple strategies to ensure that every classroom has qualified teachers.

Teacher Compensation

In the higher education focus group, there was consensus that one of the largest challenges in attracting students to early education coursework is the low compensation typical in the field. In fact, the reason behind pay comparability between qualified teachers in NC Pre-K located in child care centers and teachers in the public school system (such as those employed in Bright Beginnings) is to better position NC Pre-K centers to competitively hire and retain qualified teachers.

- Pay comparability helps ensure that qualified teachers pursue employment in any public pre-k program expansion in Mecklenburg County – teachers from within the county, throughout the state, and potentially from other states.
- Pay comparability is also an incentive for the current child care workforce to obtain higher qualifications – knowing that compensation will increase as a result.

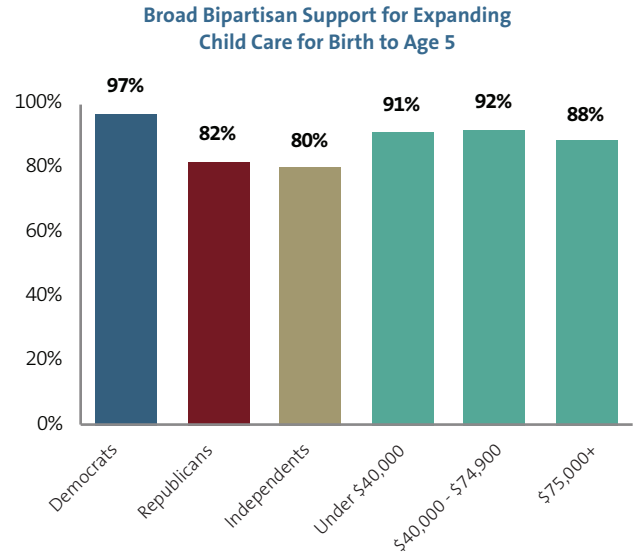
Talent Development

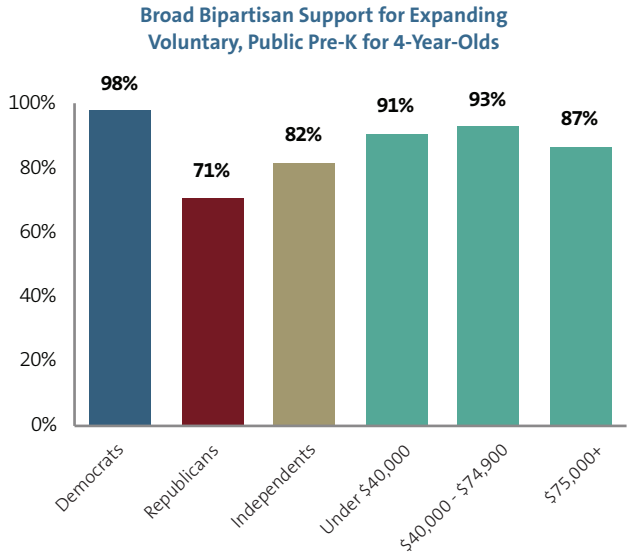
In the child care provider, ECE workforce, and higher education focus groups, there was consensus that talent development takes time, tuition support, and often advisory support – particularly for individuals who are taking college courses while they work full-time or who have been in the workforce for many years, but who have no recent experience with college level coursework.

Providing opportunities to develop the current early educator workforce, those who want to obtain an Associate's degree (AA), those who have an AA who want to pursue a Bachelor's degree (BA) and teacher license, as well as those who need and want training and technical assistance to support translating knowledge to effective strategies in the classroom, creates a pathway for Mecklenburg County to build a pipeline to help support a high-quality early educator workforce from birth to age five.

> *"We don't grow talent as well as we should. Developing talent encourages excellence and loyalty. If you are not developing your talent, that's just not a good strategy in the long-term."*
>
> Source: Business Leader Focus Group, June 30, 2017

Starting School Ready to Learn is Important





93% agree that children do better in school if they start school ready to learn

The Mecklenburg County poll was conducted between May 16 and June 13, 2017. The survey reflects 1,000 residents age 18 and older throughout Mecklenburg County on both landline and cell phones. The margin of error for the full sample of 1,000 is +/- 3%.

Upskilling the ECE workforce helps retain and promote teacher diversity

When staff are from the community served and reflect similar backgrounds, they may be better equipped to form meaningful relationships with children and families and help parents develop their skills to prepare their children to succeed in school.[105]

In 2015, nearly half of the teaching workforce in child care centers in Mecklenburg County were people of color.[106] In contrast, about 31% of CMS elementary school teachers are people of color,[107] while children of color represent about 66% of students in CMS elementary school classrooms.[108] Providing opportunities for the current ECE workforce to attain higher levels of education and on-site support will help ensure that the ECE workforce retains its diverse nature reflecting the children and families throughout the county.

There are lessons learned from other communities that have faced workforce challenges in public pre-k expansion and talent development. Across initiatives, at the core of public pre-k expansion have been strategies to provide pay comparable to public school teachers regardless of setting (when aligned with public school teacher qualifications), higher education tuition assistance, and professional development support (training and on-site technical assistance such as coaching). A more in-depth description of some community ECE initiatives is included in the appendix.

Executive Committee Support for Pre-K Quality

Members of the Executive Committee spent considerable time talking about public pre-k program quality. **Concern was expressed that any expansion be phased-in, have qualified teachers, be supported by workforce coaching for best practices, continuously monitor children for progress made or to identify best strategies for each child, and be subject to program-wide evaluation.**

Members also discussed the costs associated with offering free public pre-k for families compared to offering public pre-k with parent fees based on ability to pay *(i.e., a sliding fee scale with families paying a percentage of pre-k tuition based on income).* Communities throughout the country are split on the approach to parent fees for public pre-k. For example, Boston,[109] New York City,[110] the District of Columbia,[111] and some preschools in Chicago,[112] offer preschool for free. Denver,[113] Salt Lake City,[114] San Antonio,[115] and Seattle[116] have some type of sliding fee scale based on family income.

Executive Committee members agreed that voluntary, universal, public pre-k should be offered for all 4-year-olds in the county (building on Bright Beginnings and NC Pre-K).

While a number of members supported offering pre-k free to participating children, consensus was reached that the costs were too high given other priorities (such as hiring and retaining an educated workforce to improve child outcomes and to promote school readiness).

There was consensus that public pre-k expansion should build on community-based programs (child care centers and Head Start) rather than divert 4-year-olds from these programs as part of public pre-k expansion.

Particularly with regard to child care centers, members felt that licensed excess capacity currently exists and that diverting 4-year-olds away from child care centers would potentially jeopardize the economics of center operations – thereby increasing the likelihood of centers closing or increasing costs for the enrollment of younger children, both of which would make finding and affording child care in the community more difficult for woking families.

In the focus group with family child care providers, some providers expressed an interest in being included in any public pre-k expansion for those meeting educational qualifications. With the small number of 4- and 5-year-old children (122) enrolled in family child care homes,[117] the Executive Committee decided not to pursue this presently. The Committee looks forward to reviewing the evaluation results from a family child care home preschool pilot underway in Seattle.[118]

Based on lessons learned by other communities, strategies to hire, retain, and build on the current workforce must be built into any public pre-k expansion in the county.

- New York City's expansion to more than 50,000 children occurred over 2 years and involved more than 2,000 lead teachers (some with a work plan to reach program credentials).
- New Jersey's expansion to more than 38,000 children in 31 school districts occurred quickly with provisional plans in place, which initially allowed teachers to meet qualifications over 4 years and was extended to 6 years).

Both programs involved hiring new lead teachers and providing a pathway for teachers who self-selected to upskill their credentials.

Public Pre-K Access Recommendations:

Short-term (2018-2020) –
Enroll children below 200% of poverty

Over the next three years, expand voluntary, public pre-k to all 4-year-old children (currently not served in Bright Beginnings or NC Pre-K) at or below 200% of poverty (3,046 children). Assuming an 80% participation rate, an additional 812 children would participate in each of the three years in 45 new classrooms annually. Year 1 costs would be $9 million; Year 2 costs would be $16.3 million; and Year 3 costs would be $23.7 million. Start-up costs average $37,800 per classroom for a total of $1.7 million for 45 new classrooms in each of the first 3 years.

Medium-term (2021-2023) –
Enroll children above 200% of poverty

Expand voluntary, public pre-k to all 4-year-old children above 200% of poverty in Years 4 to 6 (5,148 children). Assuming an 80% participation rate, an additional 1,372 children would participate in each of the three years in 76 new classrooms annually. If offered free, Year 1 costs would be $15.2 million; Year 2 costs would be $27.6 million; and Year 3 costs would be $40 million. Start-up costs average $37,800 per classroom for a total of $2.8 million for 76 new classrooms in each of Years 4-6.

Public Pre-K Expansion for 4-Year-Old Children

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	3 Year Total
Number of 4-year-old children served at or below 200% of poverty	812	1,624	2,436	4,872 children will have participated
Classrooms needed	45	90	135	135 classrooms
Start up costs for new classrooms	$1,705,200	$1,705,200	$1,705,200	$5,115,600
Total cost	$9,047,304	$16,389,408	$23,731,512	$49,168,224

*Based on current costs of the NC Pre-K program

Public Pre-K Expansion for 4-Year-Old Children				
	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	3 Year Total
Number of 4-year-old children served above 200% of poverty	1,372	2,744	4,116	8,232 children will have participated
Classrooms needed	76	152	229	229 classrooms
Start up costs for new classrooms	$2,881,200	$2,881,200	$2,881,200	$8,643,600
Total cost	$15,286,824	$27,692,448	$40,098,072	$83,077,344

*Based on current costs of the NC Pre-K program; costs related to children above 200% of FPL; with no sliding fee scale for tuition.

Sliding tuition fee scale based on income

The Executive Committee recommends a sliding fee scale for families above 200% of FPL with families paying a percentage of pre-k fees based on income. A sliding fee scale with families above 200% of FPL paying 10% of pre-k tuition with the percentage of tuition paid increasing as income rises (until families pay the full cost of tuition at 500% of FPL and higher income levels). With breakpoints of 10%, 25%, 50%, and 100%, revenues could yield $7.4 million in Year 1, $14.8 million in Year 2, and $22.2 million in Year 3.

The county cost to supplement tuition fees for families on a sliding fee scale basis would be $7.8 million in Year 1, $12.8 million in Year 2, and $17.8 million in Year 3. See appendix for additional details on sliding fee construct.

Serving Children with Disabilities

Research shows that identifying children who may have disabilities or developmental delays as early as possible is of critical importance to promote child development and ensure that children receive appropriate intervention services.[119]

In 2016-2017, 1,751 children age 3-5 received services through the Exceptional Children (EC) program at a cost of $7.09 million, of which $4.7 million (67%) was non-federal funding.[120] These children received services in a variety of settings (e.g., home, child care, public pre-k, and Head Start). In expanding public pre-k to serve an additional 6,552 children, it is anticipated that some of the children not previously served in a formal program could be identified as needing EC intervention services. At $1,952 per child (67% of the per child cost),[121] additional EC funding for year 1 is estimated at $107,782 rising to $869,686 in Year 6.

Public Pre-K Expansion for 4-Year-Old Children				
	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	3 Year Total
Number of 4-year-old children served above 200% of poverty	1,372	2,744	4,116	8,232 children will have participated
Classrooms needed	76	152	229	229 classrooms
Start up costs for new classrooms	$2,881,200	$2,881,200	$2,881,200	$8,643,600
Overall cost for 4 year-old children above 200% of poverty	$15,286,824	$27,692,448	$40,098,072	$83,077,344
Revenues raised through sliding fee scale for families above 200% FPL	$7,400,534	$14,801,069	$22,212,391	$44,413,994
Net cost after fee scale applied	$7,886,290	$12,891,379	$17,885,681	$38,663,350

*Based on current costs of the NC Pre-K program; costs related to children above 200% of FPL with sliding fee scale applied at 10%, 25%, 50%, and 100% of fees. Does not include costs for children below 200% of FPL.

Public Pre-K Expansion for 4-Year-Old Children (Estimated Costs for Children with Disabilities)						
	Children Below 200% of Poverty			Both Above & Below 200% of Poverty		
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
Number of 4 year-old children (80% participation)	812	1,624	2,436	3,808	5,180	6,552
Children potentially identified as needing Exceptional Children services	55	110	166	259	352	446
Estimate of non-federal costs at 67%	$107,782	$215,563	$323,345	$505,459	$687,572	$869,686

Note: Assumes 6.8% of children each year may potentially be identified as needing early intervention services.

Transportation

The Executive Committee recommends that bus transportation costs be built into public pre-k site contracts at the same rate as CMS calculates for transportation for children to attend Bright Beginnings (currently $672 annually per child, with an assumption that about 58% of children will be bus riders).[122] Assisting children at or below 200% of FPL costs in Year 1 would be $484,261; Year 2 costs would be $800,746; and Year 3 costs would be $1.1 million. Estimated costs for Year 4 to 6 are: $1.6 million in Year 4; $2.1 million in Year 5; and $2.7 million in Year 6 (all years reflect gap funding to current NC Pre-K children in order to treat transportation funding the same between Pre-K expansion children, current NC Pre-K children, and Bright Beginnings children).

Parent Engagement

Each of the ECE programs operating in Mecklenburg County includes parent engagement requirements. It is anticipated that any expansion of public pre-k would also include these components at no additional cost.

Potential Impact of Pre-K Expansion on Child Care Subsidy

As public pre-k is expanded in Mecklenburg County, it is likely that some portion of the families of the 1,208 4-year-old children[123] who currently receive a child care subsidy for full-time care will choose to enroll in public pre-K. With working parent(s), many of these children would need wrap-around care (before and after pre-k hours) instead of full-time care (for months during the school year). Reduced subsidy expenditures for these children (the difference between full-time care and part-time care during the school year) would free up funds that could be used to serve additional younger or older children. For example, monthly child care subsidy expenditures for May 2017 4-year-old children in full and 3/4 time care were $793,606. If 80% of these children were to participate in public pre-k, expenditures related to the provision of part-time (wrap-around) care for these children are estimated at $273,338 (which would mean an additional $520,268 during school year months that could be available to serve younger or older children).[124]

Classrooms Require Qualified Teachers

In order to expand access to public pre-k over the next 6 years, a significant increase in the pre-k workforce will be needed to appropriately staff classrooms (364 new teachers and 364 new assistant teachers to reach universal participation of 4-year-old children). Other communities have shown this is possible through two primary strategies: paying teachers with the same educational credentials and experience comparably regardless of physical setting (public school, child care centers, Head Start) and investing in the current workforce to promote internal talent development.

ECE Workforce Recommendations

The Executive Committee recommends that the County issue RFPs for the administration of an ECE Workforce Talent Development and Retention Program, which would include several strategies to enhance and expand the ECE workforce.

Because a child's progress in pre-k relies to a large extent on experiences and development before pre-k, the ECE Workforce Talent Development and Retention Program would be focused on the ECE workforce as a whole – not one component of the workforce (e.g., pre-k teachers only).

The concept is to hire and retain a quality ECE workforce for children from birth to age five throughout the county.

ECE Workforce Talent Development and Retention Strategies

Pay Comparability for Pre-K Teachers

For voluntary, universal, public pre-k, 364 new classrooms will be needed (in addition to the 56 NC Pre-K classrooms and 180 Bright Beginnings classrooms that are currently operating). To attract qualified teachers to positions within an expanded public pre-k program, the county should supplement current contracts to maintain teacher pay comparability *(i.e., if public school teachers receive a raise by the state, NC Pre-K teachers in private settings would receive a raise as well)*.

Teachers in the Bright Beginnings program are CMS employees and therefore receive salaries and benefits as CMS teachers. Out of the 2016-2017 Mecklenburg NC Pre-K budget of $9 million, $676,256 was used to provide supplemental/differential payments to NC Pre-K programs. Excluding transportation costs ($224,000), $452,256 of the supplemental payments (about 5% of the annual NC Pre-K budget) was used to supplement teacher comparability costs (e.g., health and life insurance, retirement, and salary supplements). Funding was not sufficient in 2016-2017.

To better prepare for continued pay comparability in future years, the supplemental/differential payments should be increased from 5% of the NC Pre-K budget to 6%. For current classrooms, the first year cost would be $93,489 with a cost over 6 years of $560,934. Contracts for new classrooms would follow a CMS pay comparability model, which assumes a corresponding increase to raise supplemental payments from 5% of the pre-k budget annually to 6%, for a first year cost of $73,421 (45 classrooms) and a cost over 6 years of $1.8 milion.

Total new costs from increasing supplemental/differential payments from 5% to 6% of a public pre-k budget in the first year is $166,910 and $685,921 in the 6th year.

Supplemental Payments for Teacher Pay Comparability
Net Increase at 6% of NC Pre-K Budget (vs 5% Currently)

Classrooms	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
Current	$93,489	$93,489	$93,489	$93,489	$93,489	$93,489
New	$73,421	$146,842	$220,263	$344,319	$468,376	$592,432
Total	$166,910	$240,331	$313,752	$437,808	$561,865	$685,921

Note: Based on current supplemental/differential payments in Mecklenburg NC Pre-K classrooms

Pre-K Teacher Retention Grant Pilot

Ramping up voluntary, universal public pre-k at a steady pace, building on the current 236 classrooms (56 NC Pre-K classrooms and 180 Bright Beginnings classrooms), ultimately will involve 600 classrooms when fully phased-in. This is a significant increase in the ECE workforce, which will involve hiring teachers from within the County, from other areas of the state, and potentially outside the state (in addition to strategies to incent the current workforce to obtain a BA and B-K license). To reduce turnover, which would make expansion a greater challenge, a Retention Incentive Program should be piloted to determine if retention payments reduce turnover.

Offering a Retention Incentive Program as a pilot over the 6-year expansion period presents an opportunity for review, redesign, or termination depending upon program evaluation. Similarly to retention incentive payments currently operating in New York City, $1,200 per year would be offered for returning lead teachers who were employed as a lead teacher **at the same pre-k child care center in the prior school year.** Returning teachers would be required to be verified by October 15, 2018 (for the 2018-2019 school year, and October 15 of each successive school year). Lead teachers and programs would be required to work together to submit completed applications.

Child care centers housing public pre-k classrooms would be required to submit proof of lead teachers' continuous employment through February 10, 2019 (and February 10 of each successive year). Pre-k centers would receive retention funds to distribute to lead teachers who have been approved and would be required to submit proof of disbursed retention funds to teachers. Pre-k centers that fail to submit proof of disbursement will have funds deducted from their budget for the next school year. Teachers employed by the public school system are not eligible for retention grants.

The cost for pre-k retention grants would have a first year cost of $53,760 (in year 2) rising to $329,707 in year 6.

Current NC Pre-K Teacher Qualifications

Lead teachers are required to hold or be working toward a NC Birth through Kindergarten (B-K) license or the equivalent.

Assistant teachers are required to hold or be working toward an Associate degree in early childhood education or child development (ECE/CD) or a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential.

North Carolina Pre-Kindergarten (NC Pre-K) Program Requirements & Guidance, SFY2016-2017. (October 2016). http://ncchildcare.dhhs.state.nc.us/pdf_forms/NCPre-K_Program_Requirements_Guidance.pdf

Dual Language Incentive

About 17,000 children (12% of students) in Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools (K-12) are students with limited English proficiency.[125] To better meet the needs of dual language learning children, programs with pre-k teachers and assistant teachers who pass an oral language fluency exam in both languages or who have a degree from one of UNC Charlotte's Graduate Programs in Teaching English as a Second Language[126] (or comparable program) could receive a salary increase passed through to teaching staff through the supplemental payment account used to pay community-based programs offering public pre-k (as long as they are teaching dual language learning children in their classrooms in the language of proficiency).

Seattle Dual Language Teacher Incentive

In Seattle, preschool programs with certified dual language teachers receive funds to pay teachers 10% more than they would otherwise be eligible for if:

Lead teachers hold a state teaching certificate and endorsements in both bilingual education and ECE and teachers' languages of fluency match the languages of instruction in the classroom.

Assistant teachers pass an oral language fluency test in both languages of instruction.

Source: Seattle Preschool Program Plan, July 2015, http://clerk.seattle.gov/~CFS/CF_319422.pdf

Lead Teachers in Child Care Programs Serving Children Whose Care is Publicly Subsidized

North Carolina's star rated license[127] requires 4- and 5-star programs to have at least 75% of lead teachers with an AA degree. In region 6, which includes Mecklenburg County, turnover among lead teachers is much higher than the statewide average (28% in region 6 compared to 19% statewide).[128] Child care teachers earn about $11 per hour or $22,880 per year.[129] In contrast, the Census Bureau reports that median income for an individual with an AA degree in Mecklenburg County is $31,563 (or about $15.17 per hour).[130]

Numerous studies speak to the importance of continuity of care for children's development[131] and in 2014 Congress passed a new child care law that promotes continuity of care by requiring that a child remain eligible for a child care subsidy for 12 months as long as family income does not exceed 85% of state median income.[132] The federal law addresses continuity of care for children through a minimum eligibility period for subsidy, but does not address teacher continuity (which is also part of the continuity of children's care).

To promote high-quality in lead teachers and to reduce turnover, a parallel structure to the pre-k teacher workforce incentives should apply for lead teachers in child care programs that serve children whose care is paid for with a subsidy.

Child Care Pay Comparability Pilot

Offering a child care lead teacher pay comparability pilot over the 6-year expansion period as public pre-k is implemented, presents an opportunity for review and evaluation. Child care programs serving children whose cost of care is publicly subsidized could select to receive a pay comparability supplement for each teacher with an AA in early childhood education (e.g., on average, a $4 per hour increase to promote comparability to the median wage of AA degreed individuals county-wide) with performance conditions.

Lead teachers who accept comparability pay would be subject to evaluation (minimum CLASS™ scores or other criteria to be determined that measure teacher performance) and be required to conduct age- and developmentally-appropriate child assessments (to chart child progress and better inform strategies to reach each child). No program or teacher would be required to receive pay comparability. For classroom teachers who choose to participate, parents would receive information about the rationale for assessments to help chart growth and develop effective approaches for each child. Parents could opt-out for their child, however, the intent would be to educate parents about the link between assessment and effective approaches to reach each child.

Child Care Retention Grants Pilot

Offering a child care lead teacher retention grant pilot over the 6-year expansion period as public pre-k is implemented, presents an opportunity for review and evaluation. Retention grants would offer a $1,200 incentive for returning lead teachers who were employed as a lead teacher **at the same child care program in the prior school year.** Returning lead teachers must be verified by October 15, 2018 (for the 2018-2019 school year and October 15 of each successive school year). Teachers and programs would be required to work together to submit completed applications. Child care centers must submit proof of teachers' continuous employment through February 10, 2019 (and February 10 of each successive year). Child care centers would receive retention funds to distribute to teachers who have been approved, and programs would be required to submit proof of disbursed retention funds to teachers. Programs that fail to submit proof of disbursement would have funds deducted from their contracts for the next school year.

To remain eligible for comparability pay and a retention grant, minimum CLASS™ scores or an alternate validated teacher assessment would be required. The purpose would be to value AA degreed staff, reduce turnover, and promote quality settings for all children birth to age five.

A $4 per hour increase would be an increase of about $8,320 per year for teachers with an AA degree in ECE. There are currently 547 regulated child care programs in Mecklenburg County (364 centers and 183 homes), which includes 75.5% of centers and 50.8% of homes that care for children on a subsidy.[133]

Based on current estimates of teaching staff in licensed programs that care for children receiving a subsidy, there are about 870 lead teachers, assistant teachers and family child care providers who currently have at least an AA in early childhood education (and who also serve children whose care is paid for with a subsidy).[134]

With comparability pay based on provider and teacher selection, as well as evaluation (CLASS™ minimum scores or another validated teacher assessment), it is anticipated that 50% may choose to participate.

Child Care Comparability Pay Cost

Comparability pay to raise income for teachers with a current AA in early childhood education to the median AA earnings in Mecklenburg County would have a first year cost of $3.6 million rising to $4 million in Year 6.[135]

An evaluation of the child care pay comparability pilot would help inform discussion about the impact of a pay comparability strategy on building and retaining a strong child care workforce within the county.

Child Care Retention Grant Cost

If these teachers stayed in their programs, they would be eligible for a retention grant of $1,200 for each year they continue teaching. Retention grants may assist teachers with the cost of health care coverage (which would be at the discretion of each teacher since individuals could have other means of accessing health care). However, a retention grant strategy would be a statement by the county to support benefit costs for the child care workforce as most child care centers currently do not provide health benefits. Alternatively, retention grants could be used by recipients to access higher education coursework, or used for more pressing household needs. Retention grants would have a first year cost (in Year 2) of $522,000 rising to $634,494 in Year 6.

An evaluation of the pilot would help inform discussion about the impact of retention grant strategy on building and retaining a great child care workforce within the county.

The intent of both child care pilots would be to:

- Reward and strengthen the ECE workforce, and reduce teacher turnover;
- Expand the number of programs that choose to serve children birth to age 5 whose care is paid for with a subsidy; and
- Provide high-quality classrooms for children from birth to age 5.

Talent Development

Technical Assistance (On-site consultation and coaching)

All Mecklenburg expansion public pre-k classrooms and child care programs participating in the Talent Development and Retention Program will be supported by on-site coaching to assist with public pre-k implementation and strong evidence-based practices to advance and enhance knowledge of quality instruction and research-based approaches in classroom management, child development, inclusion, bilingual support, cultural relevancy, social and emotional development, language and literacy, and math through age- and developmentally-appropriate practices from birth to age five. The estimated annual cost for on-site technical assistance will be determined once program options (and phase-in) are selected.

Tuition Scholarships

In focus groups with child care program owners and directors, the ECE workforce, and the higher education community, there was agreement that the cost of tuition for higher education is a barrier for enrollment by individuals in the low-wage child care field. There was concern raised by child care providers that some individuals who receive T.E.A.C.H. scholarships obtain their degree and leave for better paying positions. Through pay comparability components of the ECE Workforce Talent Development and Retention program, it would be the intent to retain and grow a high-quality, stable ECE workforce.

Between July of 2015 and June of 2016, 281 early educators in Mecklenburg County received a T.E.A.C.H. scholarship.[136] To supplement current resources to assist with tuition costs, funds should be made available for individuals who wish to pursue an AA in early childhood, a BA in early childhood, and/or a B-K license. ECE Workforce Talent Development tuition assistance would cover tuition and books, however, courses would be undertaken on an individual's own time (e.g., weekends, evenings, and summers). As a condition of receiving scholarship assistance, a grade point average of 2.75 must be retained (consistent with UNC Charlotte's current policies that require education majors to maintain a 2.5 GPA overall and a 2.75 GPA in their professional courses).[137]

With teachers self-selecting to pursue higher education, and understanding that such coursework would be undertaken on their own time, it is anticipated that only the most highly motivated would apply. It would be an opportunity for individuals to create their own pathway to pay comparability and retention bonuses. In New Jersey, teacher scholarships to meet the New Jersey Supreme Court teacher qualifications were paid for from TANF funding.

To expedite expansion of Mecklenburg public pre-k classrooms (similarly to New Jersey, New York City, and Seattle), lead teachers would be permitted to continue teaching a pre-k classroom while in degree and certification programs and have 4 years to complete such programs. Tuition assistance would support only those courses that lead to education or certification requirements and individuals would be required to maintain a minimum grade point average. Tuition assistance recipients would be required to teach or work in a Mecklenburg public pre-k program in the county for a minimum of 3 years after receiving a degree or, would be required to repay the total or a prorated amount of tuition assistance based on their length of service.

For tuition support for child care staff related to obtaining an AA or BA in early childhood, tuition recipients would be required to maintain a minimum grade point average and teach or work in their current child care program for a minimum of 3 years after receiving a degree. If either of these requirements are not met, the recipient would be required to repay the total or a prorated amount of tuition assistance based on their length of service.

Additional Recommendations to Support Talent Development:

- Undertake a baseline study of the ECE workforce in licensed child care programs within Mecklenburg County (e.g., position, level of education, credentials, number of years of experience, race, ethnicity, language, gender, turnover, etc.).
- Review TANF funding options to support tuition needs. For 2017-2018, the annual cost for in-state tuition and fees to attend CPCC full-time is $4,130 ($76 per credit hour).[138] For 2017-2018, the annual cost for in-state tuition and fees at UNC Charlotte full-time is $6,973.[139] Books and supplies are estimated at $1,200-$1,400.[140]
- Create a working group of Central Piedmont Community College (CPCC), University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNC Charlotte), and Child Care Resources Inc. (CCRI) to recommend and implement strategies to respond to a greater need for staffing positions from birth to age 5 (including the need for bilingual staff) and to better meet the needs of nontraditional students (e.g., weekend classes, evening classes, online classes, cohort support strategies, offering university coursework at community college locations, hiring additional advisors/life navigators to better support success for the nontraditional workforce and pairing coursework with on-site technical assistance).
- Assess on-site technical assistance needs for curriculum implementation support and classroom strategies.

Evaluation and Accountability

The Executive Committee discussed evaluation and accountability concepts and there was consensus that evaluation costs should be built into the design of any expanded pre-k initiative.

There was also agreement that evaluation can help inform strategies for continuous quality improvement to ensure that programs within the county are held accountable for public dollars.

Current Program Evaluation

The current NC Pre-K, Bright Beginnings, Head Start, EHS, and EHS-CCP, and star-rated child care programs involve some level of evaluation. Evaluations vary by funder, funding stream, program purpose, evaluation purpose, and evaluation target (i.e., programs, classrooms, teachers, and children).

Programs

Child care programs are evaluated as part of NC's star rated license. Environment rating scales are used to rate programs and strongly focus on structural quality and also focus on process quality – processes that have been found to be predictive of child outcomes.[141]

Teacher Assessments

Classroom teachers can be assessed using validated assessment tools, such as the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS),™ which is used to measure the quality of teacher interactions with children (i.e., process quality).[142] The CLASS™ assessment is not part of NC's star rated license. CLASS™ is required by the federal government to be used in Head Start classrooms. CLASS™ is used in North Carolina's statewide evaluation of the NC Pre-K program, however, CLASS™ is currently not used in individual NC Pre-K classrooms or in Bright Beginnings' classrooms operating in the county. Estimated costs related to materials and certification of CLASS™ per classroom is $2,200, which could potentially be negotiated as part of a bulk purchase.[143]

Child Assessments

Ongoing child assessments are required as part of Head Start, NC Pre-K, and Bright Beginnings. Child care programs may voluntarily assess children but are not required to conduct ongoing child assessments as part of NC's star rated license.

Many community-wide public pre-k programs require the use of CLASS™ and ongoing child assessments. A more extensive evaluation of children throughout program classrooms is sometimes undertaken as a random sample (e.g., the statewide evaluation of NC Pre-K).[144]

Evaluation Recommendations

The Executive Committee recommends that an evaluation for NC Pre-K classrooms (current and expansion classrooms), Bright Beginnings' classrooms, and child care programs choosing to participate in ECE Workforce Talent Development and Retention strategies be developed. While the county cannot dictate how the NC Pre-K and Bright Beginnings programs operate, Executive Committee members are hopeful that a common evaluation approach can be undertaken.

Evaluation data should be used for continuous quality improvement to ensure that across programs, the best approaches for children's development are implemented. The basic framework for evaluation should involve both external and internal evaluations:

External

- Evaluation of public pre-k (NC Pre-K, Mecklenburg pre-k expansion classrooms, and Bright Beginnings) to include teacher and child assessments;
- Evaluation of the pre-k and child care retention grant pilots as well as the child care teacher comparability pilot to determine impact on program quality and continuity of care (usage, reduced turnover, performance) to inform discussion on maintenance, revision, or termination; and
- Evaluation of higher education tuition support assistance, (participation, completions, and center turnover as well as any identified barriers) to inform discussion on maintenance, revision, or termination

Internal

- Teachers to conduct ongoing child assessments using age- and developmentally-appropriate assessment tools such as Teaching Strategies Gold[145] and Individual Growth and Development Indicators (IGDIs)[146]
- Assessments to be aggregated and reported annually and integrated with Read Charlotte's Data Collaborative as appropriate

Accountability

- Access and progress metrics

Financing

The Executive Committee discussed various financing options to clear the child care subsidy waiting list; expand voluntary, universal public pre-k to all 4-year-old children in the county; and address related collateral costs such as growing the ECE workforce, providing technical assistance to support high-quality ECE programs and classrooms, and developing and implementing evaluation to promote continuous quality improvement and accountability.

A wide variety of funding approaches have been used by communities across the country to finance public pre-k (See page 37).

Public Will Supports Increased Revenues to Expand Early Care and Education

As mentioned in the introduction, a recent Mecklenburg County poll found strong support for the County Commission to do more to make quality early childhood education programs available in the county.[147]

Half the respondents were asked if they would be willing to pay $10 more in taxes per month to increase access to child care and public pre-k and the other half were asked if they would be willing to pay $20 more in taxes per month.

Child Care Support

- 72% of respondents supported a $10 monthly increase in taxes to expand access to high-quality child care.
- 71% of respondents supported a $20 monthly increase in taxes to expand access to high-quality child care.

Willing to Pay Increased Taxes for Child Care		
Family Income	Yes on $10 Per Month	Yes on $20 Per Month
Under $40,000	75%	79%
$40,000 - $74,900	74%	76%
$75,000+	72%	67%

Mecklenburg County Poll, June 2017

Willing to Pay Increased Taxes for Public Pre-K		
Family Income	Yes on $10 Per Month	Yes on $20 Per Month
Under $40,000	77%	72%
$40,000 - $74,900	77%	69%
$75,000+	66%	69%

Mecklenburg County Poll, June 2017

Voluntary, Universal Public Pre-K Support

- 71% of respondents supported a $10 monthly increase in taxes for voluntary, universal public pre-k.
- 65% of respondents supported a $20 monthly increase in taxes for voluntary, universal public pre-k.

Support was strong across household income.

- 76% of respondents said they would be more likely to support a tax increase if it were subject to the results of an evaluation about how the program is working.

Household tax preferences

When asked about which tax they would prefer be raised to support early care and education, responses were split with no clear preference. Only 10% responded that they would not support a tax.

Public Pre-K Funding Sources Used in Communities Across the United States			
City	**Funding**	**Primary Funding Source**	**# of Children in Pre-K**
Boston, MA	$24 million+ per year	City and district funds, Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge Grant, foundation grants, Head Start, and TANF; also some federal Preschool Development/Expansion Grant funding ($15 million to be split between 5 cities to serve an additional 300 children in Boston)	2,800 + (300 through the federal Preschool Expansion Grant)
Chicago, IL	$17 million over 4 years	Title 1 with $17 million over 4 years from a Pay For Success Bond (there are multiple types of preschool initiatives funded through a variety of sources)	2,620
Cincinnati, OH	$15 million per year	Property tax: 7.93 mill levy for a period of five years that would cost the owner of a $100,000 home an additional $278 per year. (Overall levy raises about $48 million with $33 million going to K-12 schools and $15 million for preschool).	6,000 (3 and 4-year-olds) is the goal
Dayton, OH	$4 million per year	Income tax: The city's earnings tax was increased from 2.25% to 2.5%. The eight-year levy will generate about $11 million in additional annual revenue.	1,900
Denver, CO	$12.8 million per year, total annual cost of DPP $17.2 million	Sales tax: .15% ($12.8 million) and city funding	5,092
District of Columbia	$191 million per year	School funding formula, city funds, Head Start funding (i.e., funding is blended)	12,000
New York City, NY	$340 million for Pre-K Expansion per year	State grant & city funding (Total budget for Pre-K is $575 million in 2015, increased from $232 million in 2013)	71,337
Philadelphia, PA	$91 million per year	The sugary-beverage tax adds 1.5 cents per ounce to the cost of most drinks with a sugar-based sweetener or artificial sugar substitute. Pre-K opened in January of 2017.	2,000 (6,500 in year 5)
Salt Lake City, UT	$7 million (total investment)	Pay For Success & city	3,500 by 2018
San Antonio, TX	$31 million per year	Sales tax: .125% (Total budget for Pre-K about $36.5 million annually)	3,700
Seattle, WA	$58 million over 4 years	Property tax: 11 cents per $1,000 valuation	2,000 children by 2018

Sources

Boston: https://sites.google.com/bostonpublicschools.org/earlychildhood; https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/08/what-bostons-preschools-get-right/493952/; https://www2.ed.gov/programs/preschooldevelopmentgrants/index.html

Chicago: Multiple Pre-K programs. Some funded under Title I, some by Pay for Success grants. Chicago Child Parent Centers, PFS, http://www.payforsuccess.org/project/chicago-child-parent-center-pay-success-initiative; http://cps.edu/schools/earlychildhood/Pages/EarlyChildhood.aspx

Cincinnati: http://www.wcpo.com/news/government/local-politics/voters-approve-cincinnati-public-schools-tax-levy-to-fund-district-wide-preschool-program; http://www.cincinnatimagazine.com/features/preschool-promise-cincinnati-schools/; http://www.ncte.org/policy-analysis-initiative?reportid=566; http://wvxu.org/post/cpss-issue-44-passes-easily#stream/0

Dayton: http://www.daytondailynews.com/news/local-govt--politics/dayton-income-tax-hike-passes/w18ePK3lqZDqBHFGm9o88I/; http://www.daytondailynews.com/news/local-govt--politics/dayton-income-tax-hike-passes/w18ePK3lqZDqBHFGm9o88I/

Denver: http://www.dpp.org/images/general/DPP-2017-013-Annual-Report_final_web.pdf; FAQs, Denver Preschool Program, http://www.dpp.org/about-us/faqs

New York City: http://www.ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/universal-prek-enrollment-frunding-march2015.pdf, http://schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs/schools/data/stats/default.htm,

Philadelphia: http://www.philly.com/philly/news/politics/20170105_With_soda_tax__school_s_now_in_session.html; http://www.philly.com/philly/infographics/409673435.html; https://apnews.com/f24a775d1db14be7b8928f4004a4330c/philadelphia-launches-pre-k-program-funded-soda-tax; http://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2017/04/05/522626223/judges-take-up-big-sodas-suit-to-abolish-philadelphias-sugar-tax

Salt Lake City: http://www.payforsuccess.org/project/utah-high-quality-preschool-program, http://pfs.urban.org/pfs-project-fact-sheets/content/utah-high-quality-preschool-program, https://hceconomics.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/pdf/events/Salt Lake City PFS Fact Sheet (FINAL 10-28-13).pdf

San Antonio: http://www.sanantonio.gov/Pre-K-4-San-Antonio/funding, http://www.sanantonio.gov/Portals/0/Files/PreK4SA/FY2015%20Annual%20Adopted%20Budget.pdf

Seattle: https://www.seattle.gov/education/early-learning/early-learning-providers/about-our-early-learning-programs/seattle-preschool-program; http://blogs.seattletimes.com/politicsnorthwest/2014/11/04/2-preschool-measures-on-the-ballot-in-seattle/

Financing Recommendations:

The Executive Committee reviewed the polling, revenue estimates prepared by the Mecklenburg County Financial Services Department on an array of options, and the distributional impact among those options.

Concerns were raised about the regressive impact of both a sales tax and beverage tax, with a disproportionate impact among the lowest income county residents. Concerns were also raised about a beverage tax as a sustainable method of financing since a reduction in sugary beverage consumption could lead to a declining revenue source – creating a gap between revenue and ECE expansion costs.

The current combined sales tax rate for Mecklenburg County is 7.25% (i.e., the NC state sales tax rate is currently 4.75% and the Mecklenburg County sales tax rate is 2.5%). Counties have a local option to increase the sales tax by one quarter of a penny (Article 46 sales tax, G.S. 105-535)[148] through a county referendum. The ballot cannot stipulate specific uses for the sales tax, however, the County Board of Commissioners could adopt a separate resolution stipulating how the revenue would be used.

The Mecklenburg County Financial Services Department estimates that a .25% sales tax increase would yield about $50 million per year.

The current property tax is .8157 for every $100 of assessed value. An increase of a penny (to .8257 for every $100) would yield $12 million per year. For the average residential property valued at $208,176, an increase of a penny would mean an annual average increase of $21 (about $1.75 per month).[149]

County financing options exist for an expansion of ECE programs that address both access for children birth to age 5 and invest in an educated ECE workforce, which is the cornerstone of high-quality programs.

Birth to Age 5, Expansion Costs of ECE Programs in Mecklenburg County

	Year 1 2018-2019	Year 2 2019-2020	Year 3 2020-2021	Year 4 2021-2022	Year 5 2022-2023	Year 6 2023-2024	Year 7 2024-2025
Child Care Assistance							
Clear child care subsidy waiting list, birth to age 5 (3,905 children cleared & carried forward to maintain)	$28,274,160	$28,274,160	$28,274,160	$28,274,160	$28,274,160	$28,274,160	$28,274,160
Public Pre-K Expansion for 4-Year-Old Children and ECE Workforce Strategies							
Voluntary, universal public pre-k expansion (includes sliding fee for pre-k)	$13,406,257	$21,940,715	$26,174,313	$37,094,559	$43,122,902	$49,143,586	$46,262,386
Public pre-k expansion (excludes sliding fee for pre-k, free pre-k)	$13,406,257	$21,940,715	$26,174,313	$44,495,093	$57,923,971	$71,355,977	$68,474,777
Total ECE Initiative Expansion Costs							
Total ECE initiative (includes child care subsidy waiting list and voluntary, universal public pre-k **with a sliding fee scale for pre-k**)	$41,680,417	$50,214,875	$54,448,473	$65,368,719	$71,397,062	$77,417,746	$74,536,546
Total ECE initiative (includes child care subsidy waiting list and voluntary, universal public pre-k **with no sliding fee scale, free pre-k**)	$41,680,417	$50,214,875	$54,448,473	$72,769,253	$86,198,131	$99,630,137	$96,748,937

Note: Based on current costs, including start-up costs, of the NC Pre-K program and the current child care subsidy waiting list.150 Total ECE initiative costs exclude to be determined costs of on-site TA, training, training materials and assessments, higher education tuition, and evaluation. Costs decline in Year 7 for public pre-k as new start up costs are no longer needed with full enrollment reached.

Polling results found overwhelming support for a $10 or $20 per month increase in taxes to support ECE expansion.

The Executive Committee felt strongly that the county's future prosperity depends on access to high-quality ECE programs for children birth to age 5. Each child's future economic opportunity relies on his or her ability to start school ready to succeed.

The Executive Committee recommends that the Board of County Commissioners review a revenue increase, restrict its use to ECE expansion, and subject the expansion initiative to evaluation for continuous quality improvement.

Other Funding Strategies to Consider to Supplement an Expanded ECE Initiative

Under the federal *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA, P.L. 114-95),[151] which is the reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA), there are many more opportunities than in the past for school districts to use their Title I and Title II funding for early childhood education programs.

The 2017-2018 CMS budget shows:

ESSA Title I - Basic $50,106,592[152]

States can use Title I resources to support early childhood education for children from birth to age 5, whether provided by a school district, a Head Start program, or a child care program. While some funding is already used to support public pre-k for children in Mecklenburg County, the Executive Committee recommends that CMS review Title I funding to determine if additional investments from Title I funding could be made to support ECE expansion in the county.[153]

ESSA Title II - Improving Teacher Quality $6,871,749[154]

ESSA includes early childhood educators in the definition under Title II, Preparing, Training, and Recruiting High-Quality Educators. This means that there are expanded opportunities for Title II funds to be used to support professional development of the ECE workforce, including teachers in community-based settings such as child care, public pre-k, and Head Start.[155]

ESSA Title II Literacy

Under the new federal ESSA law, Title II, LEARN – Literacy Education for All, Results for the Nation – funds can be used to promote literacy initiatives in ECE programs. Specifically, funds can be used to support professional development, evidence-based early childhood education literacy initiatives, and family engagement in literacy development.[156]

It is good news that ESSA incorporates early childhood education throughout the Act as a permissive use of funds. Decisions are made by school districts and therefore, the Executive Committee recommends that CMS review Title I and Title II funding to maximize resources that could be available to support an ECE expansion throughout the county.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

The federal government allocates more than $16 billion per year through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant to states.[157] In FY2015, North Carolina spent about $567.3 million on activities related to TANF (i.e., $343.6 million in federal funds and $223.6 million in state maintenance of effort (MOE) funding).[158] About 33.6% of NC TANF funding was spent on child care and 17.7% was spent on public pre-k.

Mecklenburg County receives $8.2 million in TANF ("Work First" Block Grant) funding.[159] Because TANF funding uses vary by locality, the Executive Committee recommends that the County review TANF expenditures to determine if additional investments could be made to support ECE expansion in the county (e.g., scholarship support for the current ECE workforce to pursue higher education degrees as other states have done).

Conclusion

Mecklenburg County has a strong base of ECE programs on which to build to expand access for children birth to age 5. The Executive Committee reviewed the landscape of current ECE programs and the number of children served and eligible for ECE programs but unserved; identified access issues; and solicited community input through a county poll and focus groups of individuals within the community.

The brain research shows the importance of access to high-quality ECE programs for children in their earliest years. The infrastructure within the county exists, it is under-financed.

The Executive Committee recommends clearing the child care subsidy waiting list to promote family economic stability linked to parent employment and to promote the healthy development of children from birth to age 5.

The Executive Committee also recommends phasing in voluntary, universal public pre-k for all 4-year-old children over a 6-year period, including a sliding fee scale for families with income above 200% of poverty to scale tuition payments.

Because a strong workforce is the cornerstone of high-quality ECE programs for children birth to 5, the Executive Committee recommends several pilots to address workforce challenges: low pay, high turnover, and access to higher education and on-site technical assistance (to help translate knowledge to effective practice).

Polling shows that there is overwhelming support to finance an expansion of ECE programs. A modest increase in taxes can help change the life trajectory and economic opportunity for children throughout the county.

While the recommendations in this report will not guarantee access for all children from birth to age 5 to high-quality ECE programs, the Executive Committee believes that the recommendations provide a significant start on a pathway toward access for all children under age 5.

The Executive Committee views these recommendations as a first step. Members feel strongly that this report is only the beginning and also look forward to focusing on strategies specifically related to children birth to age 3, given what the science shows about brain development in a child's earliest years and what evidence-based research shows works for our youngest children.

The time is now. The Executive Committee has outlined a plan and resources, and public will exists to fund it. It is time to move from putting thoughts and recommendations on paper to putting the policies and resources in place to promote economic opportunity for all children within the county. The prosperity of the county depends on it.

Recommendation Summary

The Executive Committee's 5-Point Plan

The Executive Committee's 5 recommendations represent an integrated strategy to expand ECE programs in a phased-in manner.

Recommendation 1: Clear the child care subsidy waiting list for children under age five.

- **Short-term:** Clear the current child care subsidy waiting list for children birth to age five. The cost to clear the current child care subsidy waiting list for all 3,905 children under age five is $28.3 million.
- **Ongoing:** Monitor the child care subsidy waiting list and report semi-annually to the County Commission about the number of children who are eligible for subsidy but who remain unserved on the waiting list.
- **Long-term vision:** Guarantee child care assistance with fees based on income for all working families at or below 200% of FPL with children under age five.

Recommendation 2: Implement a six-year phase-in for voluntary, universal public pre-k for all 4-year-old children, with a sliding fee scale for tuition payments applied to families above 200% of poverty.

- **Short-term (2018-2019; 2019-2020; 2020-2021):** Expand voluntary, public pre-k to all 4-year-old children (currently not served in Bright Beginnings or NC Pre-K) at or below 200% of poverty over the next three years (adding 45 new classrooms per year). Including start-up expenses, Year 1 costs would be $9 million; Year 2 costs would be $16.3 million; and Year 3 costs would be $23.7 million.
- **Medium-term (2021-2022; 2022-2023; 2023-2024):** Expand voluntary, public pre-k to all 4-year-old children above 200% of poverty in years four to six (adding 76 new classrooms per year). A sliding fee scale with families paying a percentage of program costs as income rises would raise $7.4 million in Year 1; $14.8 million in Year 2; and $22.2 million in Year 3. The county net cost for families above 200% of FPL paying less than 100% tuition would be $7.8 million in Year 1; $12.8 million in Year 2; and $17.8 million in Year 3.
- **Transportation:** Build bus transportation costs into pre-k site contracts at the same rate as CMS calculates for transportation for children to attend Bright Beginnings. With regard to assisting children at or below 200% of FPL, Year 1 costs would be $484,261; Year 2 costs would be $800,746; and Year 3 costs would be $1.1 million. With regard to Years 4 to 6, estimated costs are: $1.6 million in Year 4; $2.1 million in Year 5; and $2.7 million in Year 6 (all years reflect gap funding to current NC Pre-K children in order to treat transportation funding the same between pre-k expansion children, current NC Pre-K children, and Bright Beginnings children).
- **Serving Children with Disabilities:** As public pre-k is expanded, additional children could be identified with disabilities or developmental delays. Build supplemental funding for the Exceptional Children program into the public pre-k budget so that children who qualify receive the services they need. Estimated costs are $107,782 in Year 1 rising to $869,686 in Year 6.

Recommendation 3: Implement ECE Workforce Talent Development and Retention strategies to meet workforce needs related to high-quality child care programs and an expansion of public pre-k in child care programs.

The Executive Committee recommends that the County issue RFPs to build on community assets to maintain and operate ECE Workforce Talent Development and Retention strategies.

- **Pay Comparability for Pre-K Teachers:** To attract qualified teachers to positions within an expanded public pre-k program housed in child care centers, the county should supplement current contracts administering NC Pre-K as well as pre-k expansion contracts to maintain teacher pay comparability within private settings (i.e., base pay on qualifications and experience, not location). Over the next 6 years, 364 lead teachers will be needed to staff pre-k expansion classrooms. The estimated cost is $166,910 in Year 1 rising to $685,921 in Year 6.
- **Pre-K Teacher Retention Pilot:** A Retention Incentive Pilot Program would offer an incentive ($1,200) for returning lead teachers who were employed as a lead teacher at the same child care center-based pre-k program in the prior school year. The cost for pre-k retention grants would be $97,067 in the first year rising to $329,707 in Year 6.
- **Pay Differential for Dual Language Teachers:** To better meet the needs of dual language learning children, programs with pre-k teachers who pass an oral language fluency exam in both languages or who have a degree from one of UNC Charlotte's Graduate Programs in Teaching English as a Second Language (or comparable program) would receive an increase to pay an increased rate to bilingual teachers to meet a growing and specific need. The cost is to be determined as part of program design.

Child Care Lead Teachers in Programs Serving Children on a Child Care Subsidy

- **Child Care Pay Comparability Pilot.** A child care lead teacher pay comparability pilot would offer child care programs serving children whose care is paid for through a subsidy the opportunity to choose to receive a pay comparability supplement for each teacher with an AA in early childhood education (e.g., to promote comparability to the median wage of AA degreed individuals county-wide). Comparability pay is linked to teacher performance through a validated teacher assessment. The estimated cost is $3.6 million in Year 1 rising to $4 million in Year 6.
- **Child Care Retention Grant Pilot.** A child care retention grant pilot would offer returning AA degreed child care staff a retention grant of $1,200. Retention grants may assist teachers with the cost of health care coverage, which most child care programs do not currently provide. Retention grants would have a first year cost (in Year 2) of $522,000 rising to $634,494 in Year 6.

Talent Development

- **On-site Technical Assistance:** All public pre-k programs and child care programs participating in Talent Development and Retention strategies will be supported by on-site coaching to assist with pre-k implementation and evidence-based practices to advance and enhance knowledge of quality instruction and research-based approaches in classroom management, child development, inclusion, bilingual support, cultural relevancy, social and emotional development, language and literacy, and math through developmentally-appropriate practices from birth to age five. The estimated cost for on-site coaching will be determined in the design phase once program options and phase-in are determined.
- **Tuition Scholarships:** To supplement current resources to assist with tuition costs, funds would be available for child care teachers who wish to pursue an AA in early childhood, a BA in early childhood, and/or a B-K license. Workforce Talent Development tuition assistance would cover tuition and books, however, courses would be undertaken on an individual's own time (e.g., weekends, evenings, summers, etc.). As a condition of receiving scholarship assistance, a minimum grade point average must be retained and a service requirement of 3 years is required. A recommendation is made to review using Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funding to cover tuition support costs.

Additional Recommendations to Support Talent Development:

- Undertake a baseline study of the ECE workforce in licensed programs within Mecklenburg County (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, language, position, level of education, credentials, number of years of experience, and turnover).
- Create a working group of Central Piedmont Community College (CPCC), University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNC Charlotte), and Child Care Resources Inc. (CCRI) to recommend and implement strategies to respond to a greater need for staffing positions from birth to five (including bilingual teachers) and to better meet the needs of nontraditional students (e.g., weekend classes, evening classes, online classes, cohort support strategies, offering university coursework at community college locations, hire additional advisors/life navigators to better support success for the nontraditional workforce, and pairing coursework with onsite technical assistance).
- Assess on-site technical assistance needs for curriculum implementation support and classroom strategies.

Recommendation 4: Develop a strong evaluation component tied to ECE investment

The Executive Committee recommends that an annual evaluation for NC Pre-K classrooms (current and expansion), Bright Beginnings' classrooms, and programs choosing to participate in the ECE Workforce Talent Development and Retention strategies be developed. While the County cannot dictate how the NC Pre-K and Bright Beginnings programs will operate, Executive Committee members are hopeful that a common evaluation approach can be undertaken.

External

- Evaluation of public pre-k (NC Pre-K, pre-k expansion classrooms, and Bright Beginnings) to include teacher and child assessments.
- Evaluation of the pre-k and child care retention grant pilots as well as the child care teacher pay comparability pilot to determine impact on program quality and continuity of care (usage, reduced turnover, performance) to inform discussion on maintenance, revision, or termination.
- Evaluation of higher education tuition support assistance, (participation, completions, and center turnover as well as any identified barriers) to inform discussion on maintenance, revision, or termination.

Internal

- Teachers to conduct ongoing child assessments through age- and developmentally-appropriate tools.
- Assessments to be aggregated and reported annually and integrated with Read Charlotte's Data Collaborative as appropriate.

Accountability

- Access and progress metrics

Recommendation 5: The Board of County Commissioners should consider a revenue increase, restrict its use to ECE expansion, and subject the expansion initiative to evaluation for continuous quality improvement.

The Executive Committee reviewed the polling, revenue estimates prepared by the Mecklenburg County Financial Services Department on an array of options, and the distributional impact among those options.

- Concerns were raised about the regressive impact of both a sales tax and beverage tax, with a disproportionate impact among the lowest income county residents.
- The current combined sales tax rate for Mecklenburg County is 7.25% (i.e., the NC state sales tax rate is currently 4.75% and the Mecklenburg County sales tax rate is 2.5%). Counties have a local option to increase sales tax by one quarter penny if approved by local referendum. A .25% sales tax increase would yield about $50 million per year.
- The current property tax is .8157 for every $100 of assessed value. An increase of a penny (to .8257 for every $100) would yield $12 million per year. For the average residential property valued at $208,176, an increase of a penny would mean an annual average increase of $21 (about $1.75 per month).

The Executive Committee recommends that the Board of County Commissioners review a revenue increase, restrict its use to ECE expansion, and subject the expansion initiative to evaluation for continuous quality improvement.

Other Funding Strategies to Supplement an Expanded ECE Initiative

Under the federal *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA, PL 114-95),[160] which is the reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, there are many more opportunities than in the past for school districts to use their Title I and Title II funding for early childhood education programs.

- **ESEA Title I - Basic:** $50,106,592[161]
  States can use Title I resources to support early childhood education for children from birth to age 5, whether provided by a school district, a Head Start program or a child care program. While some funding is already used to support public pre-k for children in Mecklenburg County, the Executive Committee recommends that CMS review Title I funding to determine if additional investments from Title I funding could be made to support ECE expansion in the county.[162]
- **ESSA Title II - Improving Teacher Quality:** $6,871,749[163]
  ESSA includes early childhood educators in the definition under Title II, Preparing, Training, and Recruiting High-Quality Educators. This means that there are expanded opportunities for Title II funds to be used to support professional development of the ECE workforce, including teachers in community-based settings such as child care, public pre-k, and Head Start.[164]
- **ESSA Title II Literacy.**
  Under the new federal ESSA law, Title II, LEARN – Literacy Education for All, Results for the Nation, funds can be used to promote literacy initiatives in ECE programs. Specifically, funds can be used to support professional development, evidence-based early childhood education literacy initiatives, and family engagement in literacy development.[165]

The Executive Committee recommends that CMS review Title I and Title II funding to maximize resources that could be available to support an ECE expansion throughout the county.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

- Mecklenburg County receives about $8.2 million in TANF ("Work First" Block Grant) funding annually. Because TANF funding uses vary by locality, the Executive Committee recommends that the County review TANF expenditures to determine if additional investments could be made to support ECE expansion in the county (e.g., scholarship support for the current ECE workforce to pursue higher education degrees as other states have done).

Birth to Age 5, Expansion Costs of Early Care and Education in Mecklenburg County							
	Year 1 2018-2019	Year 2 2019-2020	Year 3 2020-2021	Year 4 2021-2022	Year 5 2022-2023	Year 6 2023-2024	Year 7 2024-2025
Child Care Assistance							
Clear child care subsidy waiting list, birth to age 5 (3,905 children cleared & carried forward to maintain)	$28,274,160	$28,274,160	$28,274,160	$28,274,160	$28,274,160	$28,274,160	$28,274,160
Public Pre-K Expansion for 4-Year-Old Children							
Number of 4-year-old children (80% participation)	812	1,624	2436	3,808	5,180	6,552	6,552
Classrooms needed	45	90	135	212	288	364	364
Cost based on current NC Pre-K program rates	$7,342,104	$14,684,208	$22,026,312	$34,431,936	$46,837,560	$59,243,184	$59,243,184
Start up costs for new classrooms	$1,705,200	$1,705,200	$1,705,200	$2,881,200	$2,881,200	$2,881,200	
Annual cost including start up	$9,047,304	$16,389,408	$23,731,512	$37,313,136	$49,718,760	$62,124,384	$59,243,184
Revenue from sliding fee scale for tuition costs				$7,400,534	$14,801,069	$22,212,391	$22,212,391
Adjusted public pre-k expansion cost	$9,047,304	$16,389,408	$23,731,512	$29,912,602	$34,917,691	$39,911,993	$37,030,793
Bus transportation current & expanded pre-k classrooms	$484,261	$800,746	$1,117,231	$1,651,982	$2,186,733	$2,721,484	$2,721,484
Estimate of non-federal costs to provide services for children with disabilities	$107,782	$215,563	$323,345	$505,459	$687,572	$869,686	$869,686
Subtotal public pre-k including bus service	$9,639,347	$17,405,717	$25,172,088	$32,070,043	$37,791,996	$43,503,163	$40,621,963
ECE Workforce Talent Development and Retention Strategies							
Public pre-k teacher pay comparability	$166,910	$240,331	$313,752	$437,808	$561,865	$685,921	$685,921
Public pre-k teacher retention pilot		$97,067	$140,373	$183,360	$256,533	$329,707	$329,707
Child care lead teacher pay comparability pilot	$3,600,000	$3,675,600	$3,749,11	$3,827,843	$3,908,228	$3,990,301	$3,990,301
Child care teacher retention pilot		$522,000	$548,100	$575,505	$604,280	$634,494	$634,494
Onsite technical assistance	TBD; Seattle has about 10.7% of the budget						
Training & materials/assessments	TBD; depends on tools selected and negotiation of prices						
Higher education tuition	TBD						
Evaluation	TBD						
Subtotal ECE workforce & evaluation	$3,766,910	$4,534,998	$1,002,225	$5,024,516	$5,330,906	$5,640,423	$5,640,423

Table continues on next page

Birth to Age 5, Expansion Costs of Early Care and Education in Mecklenburg County (continued)							
	Year 1 2018-2019	Year 2 2019-2020	Year 3 2020-2021	Year 4 2021-2022	Year 5 2022-2023	Year 6 2023-2024	Year 7 2024-2025
Combined Cost of Voluntary, Universal Public Pre-K Expansion and ECE Workforce Strategies							
Voluntary, universal public pre-k expansion (includes sliding fee for pre-k)	$13,406,257	$21,940,715	$26,174,313	$37,094,559	$43,122,902	$49,143,586	$46,262,386
Voluntary, universal public pre-k expansion (excludes sliding fee for pre-k, free pre-k)	$13,406,257	$21,940,715	$26,174,313	$44,495,093	$57,923,971	$71,355,977	$68,474,777
Total ECE Initiative Expansion Costs							
Total ECE initiative (includes child care subsidy waiting list and voluntary, universal public pre-k expansion **with a sliding fee scale for pre-k**)	$41,680,417	$50,214,875	$54,448,473	$65,368,719	$71,397,062	$77,417,746	$74,536,546
Total ECE initiative (includes child care subsidy waiting list and voluntary, universal public pre-k expansion **without a sliding fee scale --free public pre-k**)	$41,680,417	$50,214,875	$54,448,473	$72,769,253	$86,198,131	$99,630,137	$96,748,937

Note: Based on current costs, including start-up costs, of the NC Pre-K program and the current child care subsidy waiting list.166 Total ECE initiative costs exclude to be determined costs of on-site TA, training, training materials and assessments, higher education tuition, and evaluation. Costs decline in Year 7 for public pre-k as new start up costs are no longer needed with full enrollment reached.
Sources: Child Care Resources Inc. (CCRI) for child care subsidy data and costs, June 2017; Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) for NC Pre-K and Bright Beginnings data and budgeting information; U.S. Census Bureau, Bureau of Labor Statistics, and Child Care Services Association Region 6 workforce estimates (2015).

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[119] U.S. Department of Education, Early Screening is Vital to Children and their Families. https://blog.ed.gov/2014/04/early-screening-is-vital-to-children-and-their-families/

[120] Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools (CMS), September 2017.

[121] According to Charlotte Mecklenburg School (CMS), about 67% of Exceptional Children funding is non-federal. Using a conservative estimate of 6.8% (CMS estimate of current kindergarten children who are assisted through EC funding), our estimates apply 6.8% to the universe of 6,552 children to be served through public pre-k expansion. This may be high as children are often not identified as having disabilities until their early elementary school years, however, if children are in need of services, every effort was made to include potential costs in the budget estimate. In addition, assumptions were made that these children could be served in a typical public pre-k classroom (such as NC Pre-K or Bright Beginnings at a per child cost of $2,913), not a separate facility for the severely disabled where costs are much higher ($14,383 per child).

[122] Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) estimates, June 2017.

[123] Child Care Resources Inc. (CCRI). May 2017 child care subsidy expenditure data.

[124] Ibid.

[125] Charlotte-Mecklenburg Adopted Budget for 2016-2017, (August 2016). http://www.cms.k12.nc.us/cmsdepartments/Finance/Documents/2016-2017%20Adopted%20Budget%20WEB%20VERSION.pdf

[126] UNC Charlotte Graduate Programs in Teaching English as a Second Language. Graduate Teaching Certificate (GTC) in TESL, Master of Arts in Teaching (M.A.T.) and Master of Education in Teacher Education (M.Ed.). http://mdsk.uncc.edu/academic-programs/graduate-programs-teaching-english-second-language

[127] NC Division of Child Development & Early Education, Star rated licensing system. http://qa2.ncchildcare.nc.gov/providers/pv_sn2_ov_sr.asp

[128] Child Care Services Association, (2015). Fact Sheet: Early Care and Education Workforce in Region 6. http://www.childcareservices.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/regional-factsheets_Part6.pdf

[129] Ibid.

[130] U.S. Census Bureau, Table S2001, Earnings in the Past 12 Months, 2015 American Community Survey 1 year Estimates. https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_15_1YR_S2001&prodType=table

[131] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, 45 CFR Part 98, Child Care and Development Fund Final Regulations. (2016). https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2016-09-30/pdf/2016-22986.pdf

[132] The Child Care and Development Block Grant Act of 2014 (PL113-186), https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-113s1086enr/pdf/BILLS-113s1086enr.pdf

[133] Child Care Resources Inc. (CCRI), June 30, 2017

[134] CCRI estimates of teacher universe, June 30, 2017; Child Care Services Association estimates on educational level of the workforce for region 6, 2015.

[135] U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Cost Index, Table 8 Wages and Salaries, Education. (2017). https://www.bls.gov/news.release/eci.t08.htm; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Median Wage for AA in Mecklenburg County, U.S. Census Bureau, Table S 2001, 2015 American Community Survey 1 Year Estimates. Child Care Services Association, (2015). Fact Sheet: Early Care and Education Workforce in Region 6. CCRI estimates on teacher workforce in licensed care serving children on subsidy (June 2017).

[136] Data for T.E.A.C.H. scholarships from the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Project (July 2015-June 2016), http://www.childcareservices.org/ps/teach-nc/

[137] Child and Family Development Program, GPA requirements, https://catalog.uncc.edu/preview_program.php?catoid=20&poid=4109

[138] CPCC Tuition Costs for NC residents, $76 per credit hour; https://www.cpcc.edu/cashiering, 2017-2018 Annual cost of in-state tuition and fees is $4,130, https://www.cpcc.edu/financial_aid/faq/cost-of-attendance

[139] UNC Charlotte tuition costs, 2017-2018 annual cost of in-state tuition and fees is $6,973; $3,486.50 per semester http://finance.uncc.edu/student-accounts/tuition-and-fees/fall-2017-spring-2018-main-campus

[140] Books/CPCC: CPCC estimates $1,495, https://www.cpcc.edu/financial_aid/faq/cost-of-attendance, Books/UNC Charlotte: $1,200, http://www.collegedata.com/cs/data/college/college_pg03_tmpl.jhtml?schoolId=1601

[141] Environment Rating Scales, http://ers.fpg.unc.edu/

[142] The Classroom Assessment Scoring System, http://curry.virginia.edu/research/centers/castl/class

[143] Estimated costs do not include FTE costs of assessors, their training, certification, and reliability for fidelity.

[144] UNC Chapel Hill, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, 2014-2015 Evaluation of the NC Pre-K Program, http://fpg.unc.edu/node/3897

[145] Teaching Strategies Gold, https://teachingstrategies.com/solutions/assess/gold/

[146] http://igdi.ku.edu/

[147] Key findings from a Mecklenburg County poll conducted by the Committee for Economic Development and the Early Learning Policy Group between May 16 and June 13, 2017. The survey reflects 1,000 residents age 18 and older throughout Mecklenburg County on both land line and cell phones. The margin of error for the full sample is+/- 3%. For items that were asked of only half the sample (split questions), the margin of error is+/-4.5% at the 95% level of confidence. The sample was weighted to be demographically representative of the County.

[148] http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/EnactedLegislation/Statutes/HTML/ByArticle/Chapter_105/Article_46.html

[149] Mecklenburg County Finance Office Property Tax Estimates, March 2017

[150] In projecting costs for the child care subsidy waiting list, it is not possible to estimate whether the NC State Legislature will approve a rate increase for Tier 3 counties for 3-5 year-old children (as was approved in 2016 for Tier 3 infants and toddlers). It is possible a rate increase may be approved but it is not possible to estimate the level of increase or the effective date of any potential future increase for Tier 3 counties at this time.

[151] Every Student Succeeds Act, PL114-95, https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-114publ95/pdf/PLAW-114publ95.pdf

[152] Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS), Budget Book, 2017-2018. http://www.cms.k12.nc.us/mediaroom/Documents/Budget%20Book%202017-2018%20Proposed%20Budget%20Recommendation.pdf

[153] Every Student Succeeds Act, PL114-95, https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-114publ95/pdf/PLAW-114publ95.pdf

[154] Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS), Budget Book, 2017-2018. http://www.cms.k12.nc.us/mediaroom/Documents/Budget%20Book%202017-2018%20Proposed%20Budget%20Recommendation.pdf.

[155] Every Student Succeeds Act, PL114-95, https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-114publ95/pdf/PLAW-114publ95.pdf

[156] Ibid.

[157] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance, TANF and MOE Spending and Transfers by Activity, FY2015: United States. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ofa/fy2015_tanf_moe_national_data_pie_charts.pdf

[158] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance, TANF and MOE Spending and Transfers by Activity, FY2015: North Carolina. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ofa/fy2015_tanf_moe_north_carolina_pie_charts.pdf

[159] NC Division of Social Services, County TANF Funding allocations, https://www2.ncdhhs.gov/dss/budget/docs/2017-2018%20docs/WFCBG%20WEB.xls

[160] Every Student Succeeds Act, PL114-95, https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-114publ95/pdf/PLAW-114publ95.pdf

[161] Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS), Budget Book, 2017-2018. http://www.cms.k12.nc.us/mediaroom/Documents/Budget%20Book%202017-2018%20Proposed%20Budget%20Recommendation.pdf

[162] Every Student Succeeds Act, PL114-95, https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-114publ95/pdf/PLAW-114publ95.pdf

[163] Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS), Budget Book, 2017-2018. http://www.cms.k12.nc.us/mediaroom/Documents/Budget%20Book%202017-2018%20Proposed%20Budget%20Recommendation.pdf.

[164] Every Student Succeeds Act, PL114-95, https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-114publ95/pdf/PLAW-114publ95.pdf

[165] Ibid.

[166] In projecting costs for the child care subsidy waiting list, it is not possible to estimate whether the NC State Legislature will approve a rate increase for Tier 3 counties for 3-5 year-old children (as was approved in 2016 for Tier 3 infants and toddlers). It is possible a rate increase may be approved but it is not possible to estimate the level of increase or the effective date of any potential future increase for Tier 3 counties at this time.

Appendix

A RESOLUTION DECLARING THAT THE MECKLENBURG BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS SUPPORTS EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION FOR ALL CHILDREN FROM BIRTH TO AGE FIVE IN MECKLENBURG COUNTY

WHEREAS, only 40% of third grade children in Mecklenburg County read proficiently, according to the National Center on Education Statistics, and only a small proportion of children in the County receive any kind of early childhood education; and

WHEREAS, third grade reading proficiency is a key economic mobility indicator; and

WHEREAS, children who are not reading proficiently by the third grade are less likely to succeed academically, graduate from high school, or be ready to succeed in college and in careers; and

WHEREAS, the evidence shows that increased third grade reading proficiency reduces rates of arrest and incarceration, reduces the use of social services, increases rates of employment, and increases likelihood of home ownership; and

WHEREAS, research indicates that the fastest rate of brain development occurs during a child's earliest years, that high quality early childhood programs improve children's cognitive, language, social, and emotional skills, and that children who enter school ready to learn have an improved approach to learning and an increased likelihood of reaching the middle class by age 40; and

WHEREAS, according to a study by the Brookings Institution, pre-school attendance ranks among the strongest success factors that influence the school-readiness of children from low-income families. In fact, children who attend some form of pre-school at age four are nine percentage points more likely to be school-ready than other children; and

WHEREAS, ensuring access to high quality early childhood education for children has proven to be one of the soundest educational investments the public can make, providing demonstrated, significant, and long-term savings in community costs for special education, grade retention, social services, and crime; and

WHEREAS, universal access to high quality early childhood education in Mecklenburg County will help decrease achievement gaps, decrease generational poverty, and increase graduation rates of students in the County; and

WHEREAS, Mecklenburg County receives a total of $46.24 million annually for child care subsidies from federal, state and local sources. Much of this funding is federal and supports child care subsidies for children ages birth to twelve. Smart Start (state) funds, totaling just over $5 million, support child care subsidies for children birth to five years of age only; and

WHEREAS, Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools spends $22.3 million on its Bright Beginnings program, which currently serves 2,850 four-year-old children. The County receives $9.1 million in NC Pre-K funds, which serves 1,006 four-year-old children. Mecklenburg County only has 556 children in the Head Start program, with 659 children on the waiting list; and

WHEREAS, there are 69,790 children ages birth to five years old in Mecklenburg County, and the funds received by the County currently enable only 3,774 children from birth to five years of age to be served by Mecklenburg's child care subsidy program and 2,663 children ages birth to five remain on the county's waiting list for child care subsidy; and

WHEREAS, on November 1, 2016, the Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners recognized, received and appropriated a $500,000 award from the Charlotte Executive Leadership Council to fund a two-phase study for developing a process to expand access to early childhood education for significantly more children in Mecklenburg County; and

WHEREAS, the County has engaged The Early Learning Policy Group/Committee on Economic Development as a consultant to assist in conducting the study and in designing an implementation plan for the County's Early Childhood Education initiative; and

WHEREAS, the County has formed and staffed an Early Childhood Education Initiative Advisory Committee to coordinate the effort to bring Universal Pre-K to Mecklenburg County; and

WHEREAS, other communities in the United States have implemented early childhood education programs, including in New York City, Denver, San Antonio, Salt Lake City, Seattle and Aspen, to name a few. While the programs in those communities vary in size and scope, the one common denominator is a community commitment to ensure that children have access to early childhood education experiences that will provide life-long benefits; and

NOW, THEREFORE, it is hereby

RESOLVED, that the Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioners supports early childhood education in Mecklenburg County for all resident children from birth to age five (5) and developing and advancing a community vision for early childhood education, including identifying reliable funding mechanisms and developing a phased plan for achieving that community vision.

The Clerk is directed to publish this resolution, and to send copies to each member of the Mecklenburg Delegation to the North Carolina General Assembly, to the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners, and to the Board of County Commissioners for each county in the State of North Carolina.

ADOPTED the 20th day of December, 2016.

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

County Attorney

Clerk to the Board

Sliding Fee Scale Option for Public Pre-K Expansion Families with Income at or Above 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) Adjusted by Family Size, Percent of Annual Pre-K Tuition Paid Monthly & Annual								
Household Size	200% of FPL	10% of Pre-K Monthly Fee	300% of FPL	25% of Pre-K Monthly Fee	400% of FPL	50% of Pre-K Monthly Fee	500% of FPL	Full Pre-K Monthly Fee
2	$24,120	$90	$36,180	$226	$48,240	$452	$60,300	$904
3	$32,480	$90	$48,720	$226	$64,960	$452	$81,200	$904
4	$40,840	$90	$61,260	$226	$81,680	$452	$102,100	$904
5	$49,200	$90	$73,800	$226	$98,400	$452	$123,000	$904
6	$57,560	$90	$86,340	$226	$115,126	$452	$164,800	$904
7	$65,920	$90	$98,880	$226	$131,840	$452	$185,700	$904
8	$74,280	$90	$111,420	$226	$148,560	$452	$206,600	$904
Annual:		**$904**		**$2,261**		**$4,521**		**$9,042**

Note: 2017 Federal Poverty Guidelines, https://aspe.hhs.gov/system/files/aspe-files/107166/povertytool2017.xlsx

Public Pre-K in Communities

New Jersey Abbott School Districts: Meeting the ECE Workforce Challenge

In New Jersey, two Supreme Court rulings (1998 "Abbott V" and 2000 "Abbott VI") required 31 of the state's lowest income school districts to offer high-quality preschool for 3 and 4-year old children beginning in 2000. High-quality programs were defined as having no more than 15 children in a class and a certified teacher and assistant in each class. Lead teachers were required to obtain a Bachelor's degree and teacher certification by September 2004.

Prior to the Court mandate, credentials for preschool depended on preschool setting. In public schools, teachers were required to have a BA and a teacher license. In private child care centers and Head Start, preschool teachers needed to have a minimum of a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential (less than an Associates' degree, about 120 clock hours of training). The Court required that districts work with programs already in the community (child care centers and Head Start) rather than develop new preschool programs in public schools in order to expedite implementation and avoid duplication. About 65% of the lead teachers in community-based programs had less than a BA at the time of the Court ruling.

Preschool services mandated by the Court did not require the current workforce to obtain a BA and teacher license. Teachers could self-select whether they would try to meet the new requirements, move to an assistant teacher position, or find other employment.

Supports such as tuition assistance funded through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program and funds to purchase books and materials (funded through state and private philanthropy) were made available to those teachers who wanted to obtain their BA and teacher license. Articulation agreements between community colleges and 4-year institutions were put in place, and creative solutions were offered by colleges: night and weekend classes, online courses, and public 4-year university courses offered at two-year college locations. The philanthropy community pitched in to support strategies to assist non-traditional students so they could be successful.

Initially, qualified teachers received a signing bonus of $3,500 - $6,000 a year for teaching in an Abbott preschool classroom. This proved not to be enough and in 2002 (Abbott VII ruling), the New Jersey Supreme Court required salary parity with public school teachers.

By 2004, 80% of teachers in community-based preschool settings had obtained a BA and teacher license. The New Jersey Supreme Court provided a 2-year extension – through 2006 – to give remaining teachers more time to meet the new requirements. About 38,000 children were participating in Abbott preschools in 2004 (at 15 children per class, staffing involved about 2,533 lead teachers). With 68% of classrooms in child care centers and Head Start programs, the community-based workforce rose to the challenge in a relatively short time period.

Sources: http://www.edlawcenter.org/cases/abbott-v-burke/abbott-decisions.html; Lobman, C., Ryan, S., and McLaughlin, J., Graduate School of Education, Rutgers University. (2005). Reconstructing Teacher Education to Prepare Qualified Preschool Teachers: Lessons from New Jersey . http://ecrp.uiuc.edu/v7n2/lobman.html; Coffman, J., Green, M., with Bruner, C., and Daniel, Y., Build Initiative. Reaching for Quality: Lessons from New Jersey on Raising Preschool Teacher Qualifications While Maintaining Workforce Diversity. (2010) http://www.buildinitiative.org/portals/0/uploads/documents/resource-center/diversity-and-equity-toolkit/abbottdiversitybrief.pdf; Center for Law and Social Policy, New Jersey Abbott Program, (2004). http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/states/0230.pdf

New York City: Meeting the ECE Workforce Challenge

In 2016-2017, over 70,400 4-year-old children were participating in New York City's free, full-day universal preschool program nearly tripling the number of children (19,483) in full day pre-k since 2013. To help recruit and train more than 2,000 new lead pre-k teachers, several strategies were put in place.

Compensation Parity: Prior to the implementation of full day pre-k, certified teachers (with a BA and teacher license) in community-based settings earned an average salary of $36,000-$40,000 per year compared to a starting salary of $45,000-$51,000 for pre-k teachers employed in public schools. The NYC Department of Education filled the gap to raise salaries to $44,000 per year for certified teachers with bachelor's degrees and $50,000 for certified teachers with master's degrees.

Teacher Signing Bonus and Retention Bonus: Pre-k programs must opt-in to participate. Participating programs must make the Lead Teacher Incentive Program available to all eligible Pre-K for All teachers at the program. The New Hire Incentive Program offers a $2,500 incentive payment for teachers who are newly hired as lead teachers in Pre-K for All classrooms. Teachers had to be certified by October 7, 2016 (for the 2016-2017 school year). The Retention Incentive Program offers a $3,500 incentive for returning lead teachers who were employed as a lead teacher **at the same pre-k program** in the 2015-2016 school year. Returning teachers must be certified by October 7, 2016 (for the 2016-2017 school year). Lead teachers and programs work together to submit completed applications. Pre-k programs submit proof of lead teachers' continuous employment through February 10, 2017. Pre-k programs receive incentive funds to distribute to lead teachers who have been approved, and programs submit proof of disbursed incentive funds to teachers. Programs that fail to submit proof of disbursement have these funds deducted from their budget for the next school year. Teachers employed by the public school system are not eligible for new hire or retention grants.

Coaching and Professional Development: The number of on-site coaches to support effective classroom practices was expanded and financial assistance was provided to help more than 400 teachers with a BA to earn their teacher certification.

Evaluation Built-in to Costs: Teachers conduct ongoing child assessments, instructional coaches observe teacher interactions with the children, and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)™ is used to assess teaching practice and assist in continuous improvement as appropriate. In addition, a $2 million contract was awarded to evaluate NYC Pre-K by studying a representative sample of 200 sites. Children are assessed on early math, verbal skills, and social-emotional skills such as self-regulation.

NYC Early Education Centers (NYCEECs): When community-based organizations operate pre-k under a contract with the NYC Department of Education (NYCDOE) or the Administration for Children's Services (ACS), the programs are called NYC Early Education Centers.

Potter, H., The Century Foundation. Issue Brief: Lessons from New York City's Universal Pre-K Expansion. (2015). https://tcf.org/assets/downloads/TCF_LessonsFromNYCUniversalPreK.pdf; NYC Department of Education, Lead Teacher Incentive Program, http://schools.nyc.gov/Academics/EarlyChildhood/educators/LeadTeacherIncentive.htm

Seattle: Meeting the ECE Workforce Challenge

The Seattle Preschool Program began classes in September of 2015, 9 months following a referendum that increased property taxes to support universal preschool (free for families below 300% of FPL; a sliding fee scale applies to families above 300% of FPL). To reach their goal of serving 2,000 children in 100 new classrooms over 4 years, the city needed to add 100 new teachers and 100 new assistant teachers. Preschool is offered in star rated programs that have at least a level 3 star rating (with minimum CLASS™ and Environment Rating Scale scores required).

Lead Teacher Qualifications. Lead teachers are required to have a Bachelor's degree in early childhood education or a BA and a Washington state teaching certificate with a P-3 endorsement.

Assistant Teacher Qualifications. Assistant teachers are required to have an Associate's degree in early childhood education or 2 years of coursework in ECE meeting Washington state Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Professionals.

Pay Comparability. Compensation varies based on degree attainment, state certification status, and experience. Lead teachers who meet education/certification requirements are paid on par with public school teachers. All lead teachers who meet education or certification requirements are expected to maintain a CLASS™ combined Emotional Support (ES)/Classroom Organization (CO) score that exceeds 6.0 and a CLASS™ Instructional Support (IS) score that exceeds 4.5. On-site coaching support for teachers is provided.

Support for Current Workforce. Teachers are permitted to continue teaching while in degree and certification programs and have 4 years to complete such programs (or obtain a 2-year extension if making satisfactory progress). Tuition assistance supports only courses that lead to Seattle Preschool Program education or certification requirements and individuals are required to maintain a minimum grade point average. Tuition assistance recipients are required to teach or work in a Seattle Preschool Program for a minimum of 3 years after receiving a degree or, are required to repay the total or a prorated amount of tuition assistance based on their length of service.

On-site Coaching. All levels of staff are offered ongoing context-based, culturally relevant, professional development related to their role(s) and responsibilities, which includes on-site curriculum support for instructional staff and their site level supervisors. One coach is assigned to every 10 classrooms.

Source: Seattle Preschool Program Plan, July 2015, http://clerk.seattle.gov/~CFS/CF_319422.pdf

Early Childhood Education Executive Committee

Mecklenburg County

Dena Diorio, Chair	Mecklenburg County Manager
Anthony Trotman	Assistant County Manager
Tameika Leslie	Project Manager

Business Leaders

Shawn Heath	Duke Energy
George Beckwith	National Gypsum

Early Childhood Education Support Organizations

Janet Singerman	Child Care Resources Inc. (CCRI)
Robert McCarter & Nancy Hughes	Smart Start of Mecklenburg County

Higher Education

Vivian Correa	UNC Charlotte
Susan Butler-Staub	Central Piedmont Community College (CPCC)

Early Care & Education Providers

Roslyn Dixon	Dixon Academy
Jared Keaton	Bethlehem Center Head Start
Carmen Morrison	Marizetta Kerry Child Development Center

Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools

Julie Babb	Bright Beginnings and NC Pre-K in Mecklenburg

Faith Community

Dr. Ricky Woods	First Baptist Church West

Philanthropic Organizations

Brian Collier	Foundation for the Carolinas

Community Organizations

Laura Clark	United Way of Central Carolinas
Violeta Moser	Latin American Women's Coalition
Molly Shaw	Communities in Schools

Community Volunteers

Anna Spangler Nelson	Spangler Companies, Inc.
Claire Tate	Community Advocate
Dorothy Counts-Scoggins	Retired
Susan Patterson	Retired

Board of County Commissioners

Ella Scarborough	Mecklenburg County Commission Chair
Trevor Fuller	Commissioner at Large
Dumont Clarke	Commissioner, District 4

Facilitators

Grace Reef	Early Learning Policy Group
Cindy Cisneros	Committee for Economic Development
Mike Petro	Committee for Economic Development

Charlotte Executive Leadership Council (CELC) Members

Name	Organization
Lynn Good, Chair	Duke Energy
Francisco Alvarado	Marand Builders
Carl Armato	Novant Health
Wil Brooks	State Farm
Ned Curran	Northwood
Pamela Davies	Queens
Susan DeVore	Premier
Theresa Drew	Deloitte
Phil Dubois	UNC Charlotte
Frank Emory	Hunton & Williams
Frank Harrison	Coca-Cola Consolidated
Mike Lamach	Ingersoll Rand
Mary Mack	Wells Fargo
Brian Moynihan	Bank of America
Fritz Nauck	McKinsey
Tom Nelson	National Gypsum
Peter Pappas	Pappas Properties
Ernie Reigel	Moore & Van Allen
Pat Riley	Allen Tate
Pat Rodgers	Rodgers Builders
Eric Steigerwalt	Brighthouse Financial
Fred Whitfield	Charlotte Hornets
Gene Woods	Carolinas Healthcare System
Lucia Zapata-Griffith	Metro Landmarks

September 1, 2017

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https://www.mecknc.gov/CountyManagersOffice/Pages/Home.aspx