



# BUILDING CAPACITY

in Buncombe County to Expand NC Pre-K  
Availability & Accessibility

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

December 2021

Full report can be found at  
<https://buncombepfc.org/reports/>



Buncombe  
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Years of research confirm that a quality preschool experience enhances child development, school readiness and life-long wellbeing. Public investments in preschool have a two-generation impact: building children's strong brains and bodies while supporting families' education and economic stability. While those preschool benefits apply at any time, there is another reason why investing in young children and families right now is especially important. For the last 19 months, the COVID-19 pandemic has had an outsized impact on children and families and the early childhood education (ECE) infrastructure that exists to support them:

- Young children have not been exposed to as many adults or peers as in non-pandemic times.
- Most adults in children's lives have experienced significant increased stress.
- Pandemic-related economic and health challenges have had a greater impact on Black Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC).
- For child care providers, 19 months of operating under emergency regulations has increased expenses, decreased service hours, and tested the resilience of all staff.
- The "Great Resignation" has had a huge impact on provider finances and staffing, making many local programs close classrooms at the same time more families are returning to work.

This report has been developed for the Buncombe County Early Childhood Education and Development Fund (ECEDF) Committee and the County Commissioners, who requested recommendations to expand NC Pre-K in Buncombe County. Their goals for this expansion included:

- Expanding access to high-quality preschool
- Increasing school readiness for children entering kindergarten
- Ensuring that the model, if fully implemented, is data-focused; diverse, inclusive, and equitable; and reflective of family and community voice

The following recommendations are not primarily about adding slots to reach the NC Early Childhood Action Plan's goal of 75% of eligible children served. They are more focused on how we build infrastructure so that slots added will be fully supported and of the highest quality, and that families across the county can truly access them—no matter their language or race or resources.

Each recommendation was developed with three things in mind:

- Directing local investments in ways that increase equity among providers, teachers, and families
- Ensuring activities build on the work of existing community partnerships
- Aligning these strategies with state-level initiatives and recommendations (WestEd's 2019 [Leandro vs. NC case report](#), NC's [Early Childhood Action Plan](#), the 2017 DCDEE study on the [costs and effectiveness of NC Pre-K](#), and the 2020 DCDEE report on the [challenges of providers to participating in NC Pre-K](#), among others)

## Summarized Recommendations:

In an effort to meet the above goals by stabilizing and growing the NC Pre-K Program locally and ensuring access to the program for those who have historically not accessed quality preschool education, we are recommending the following (See **Appendix A** for full table of recommendations with costs, implementation years, etc.):

### Strategy One:

#### A fully funded NC Pre-K program that supports quality, equity and teacher retention

1. Use local funds to subsidize the state's inadequate per-child reimbursement rate. Increasing the annual per-child reimbursement from \$7280 to \$9900 reduces the financial risk programs assume and allows smaller programs without outside revenue to provide NC Pre-K.
2. Require licensed NC Pre-K teachers in all settings to be paid on parity with similarly licensed K-12 teachers, and financially support private providers to achieve this. This will increase recruitment and retention and address historical inequities in a field dominated by women of color making near poverty wages.
3. Require assistant teachers in all settings be paid a minimum of a local living wage.

4. Prioritize program quality by supporting one full-time NC Pre-K Program Coach to provide NC Pre-K-specific curriculum/assessment supports and practice coaching for private programs. This additional support increases the likelihood that smaller, more community-focused programs (whose administrative staff is often quite small) can participate in NC Pre-K in the future.

**Recommended Implementation: Beginning Year 1; ongoing**

**Projected Cost: \$874,200 annually;** will increase as more NC Pre-K slots are added, as living wage and public school teacher pay increases, and as teacher longevity increases

## Strategy Two:

**Supports for existing ECE teachers to continue their education and achieve ECE certificates, college degrees and B-K licensure through a comprehensive ECE education and career pipeline**

1. Continue to fund BPFC's Child Care Resources (CCR) and Workforce Development Program (WDP) and expand by adding a full-time Education Advancement Coach to provide group study sessions, ongoing education and career counseling, T.E.A.C.H.™ Program support, and other assistance as needed.
2. Support one part-time A-B Tech-based ECE tutor to provide ECE-specific class supports as participants work toward their AA degree.
3. Ensure participants can be successful in their coursework by providing financial and logistical supports, including substitutes for release time, child care for study sessions, incentives upon reaching specific benchmarks, etc.

**Recommended Implementation: Beginning Year 1; ongoing**

**Projected Cost: \$131,300 annually;** could increase as new cohorts/participants are added ; this amount is additional funding to expand the WDP, currently funded by the ECEDF to support entry-level teachers.

## STRATEGY THREE:

**A "Ramp Up to NC Pre-K" program that provides intensive administrative and educational capacity-building so participating programs can meet all NC Pre-K standards on Day One of providing the program**

1. Fund one dedicated Ramp Up to NC Pre-K Program Coach to provide weekly (for teachers) or twice monthly (for directors) coaching sessions working toward specific NC Pre-K quality benchmarks. This Coach's training will include concrete skills to support educators in implementing evidence-based tools and practices (often based on white norms) in ways that honor children's diverse cultural backgrounds and individual strengths.
2. Fund NC Pre-K core instructional tools and professional development requirements for ramp-up participants. Smaller, private programs do not have the funding to purchase expensive new curricula and assessment tools before NC Pre-K funds them, so this ensures these programs have the same access to and training in these tools before full NC Pre-K provision as larger programs with multiple funding streams.
3. Ensure each educator's ability to fully participate in coaching, professional development, professional learning communities, and college coursework by supporting substitutes and semi-annual participant stipends.

**Recommended Implementation: Beginning Year 2; ongoing until expansion goal is met**

**Projected Cost: \$132,500 annually**

## STRATEGY FOUR:

**A coordinated outreach and enrollment plan that features a Single Portal of Entry to simplify the application process for families**

1. Commit to ongoing local support of an online platform (available in multiple languages) where preschool applications are submitted, communications with families are tracked, and cross-program data are collected.
2. Support a full-time, bilingual, Buncombe Preschool Outreach & Enrollment Coordinator, who will assist families in finding and using the portal, coordinate cross-program communication/placement, and regularly examine application data to ensure BIPOC families are accessing publicly funded programs.
3. Invest in a variety of promotional activities (print, radio, TV, social media, in-person) to raise awareness of the

benefits of preschool and point families to the online portal where they can apply, submit documents, and see which programs they might be eligible for.

**Recommended Implementation: Beginning Year 1** (Implementation has already begun with grant funding; recommendation is that it be an ongoing, central part of pre-k infrastructure)

**Projected Cost: \$86,500 annually;** will increase as portal is expanded to take in applications from additional programs or additional age groups; this represents roughly 30,000 additional funding, as the ECEDF funded partial-year implementation in FY22.

## STRATEGY FIVE:

### Expanded full-day and full-year (“wrap-around care”) options for working families

1. Pilot funding wrap-around services for up to 30 children who qualify for NC Pre-K but not child care subsidy vouchers. This expands access to NC Pre-K for families who cannot afford to pay for wrap-around and may not meet subsidy work requirements due to caregiving responsibilities, health limitations, or other circumstances that should not keep a child from quality education.
2. Conduct an in-depth demand and feasibility study related to extending the NC Pre-K day and year at more locations across the county.

**Recommended Implementation: Beginning Year 2**

**Projected Cost: \$222,500;** funding needs beyond first year will depend on results of study and pilot

## STRATEGY SIX:

### Expanded transportation options for families

1. Pilot providing direct funding at \$100/month to families to arrange their own transportation to NC Pre-K (via public bus, friends & neighbors, Uber, etc.), for up to 45 children. This is the amount it would cost per child for center-provided transportation, but this allows families to leverage their own resources, and it expands transportation without huge up-front vehicle purchases.
2. Pilot providing a per-child reimbursement of \$100/month to NC Pre-K providers who offer transportation for up to 45 children.
3. Conduct an in-depth demand and feasibility study related to preschool transportation.
4. Use targeted community outreach and the Single Portal of Entry to promote transportation availability. Analyze application data to assess transportation needs over time.

**Recommended Implementation: Beginning Year 2 (or later)**

**Projected Cost: \$168,000;** funding needs beyond first year will depend on results of study and pilots

## BUILDING A SYSTEM THAT WORKS FOR ALL

Increase K readiness • Expand access to Pre-K • Reduce racial & ethnic disparities

Barriers to PROVIDING

### Fully funded Pre-K

- Year 1: \$874,200

### ECE Education & Career Pipeline

- Year 1: \$131,300

### Ramp up to NC Pre-K Program

- Year 2: \$132,500

Barriers to ACCESSING

### Coordinated Outreach & Enrollment

- Year 1 \$86,500

### Expanded access to wrap-around care

- Year 2 \$222,500

### Expanded access to transportation

- Year 2+ \$168,000

Image 1: Pre-K Expansion Components