

Buncombe Partnership for Children

JULY 2021 - JUNE 2022 IMPACT REPORT



CELEBRATE!

Smiles, cuddles, learning to walk, imagination and play, not a care in the world. Early childhood should be a joyful time.

But too often in the last year, adults who take care of children have been stressed. Child care centers. Educators. Parents and families. Stress! It means they haven't always been showing up for kids like they'd like to. Childhood can feel less joyful.

The number of Buncombe children in care fell 16% during the pandemic. The number of educators dropped 11%. Too many parents and caregivers had to leave the workforce. Why? They couldn't find adequate child care. Child care centers were forced to close classrooms and raise rates because of inflation and the need to pay educators more to retain them.

We spent the year cheerleading early educators and families. Lending a listening ear. Celebrating victories big and small. We reinforced resilience in all the adults who care for children. When we're there to help the helpers, they can foster more resilience in children. We helped NC Pre-K teachers earn more for their hard work. We'll be working hard on resilience this year. Stay tuned to be part of the conversation.

Sometimes we forget about the smiles, the first steps, and the joy when we talk about early childhood education. We see a bleak picture. So we look hard for rays of sunshine piercing the dark clouds. **We celebrate. Families** keep creating magical experiences for their children. **Educators** keep showing up to work every day. Helping **children** experience joy, learn empathy, and prepare for elementary school.

Despite it all, we still dream about the future we want for all Buncombe children. We're taking steps to bring that future to life. Thank you, thank you, thank you for building that future with us!

Yours in hope and action,

Amy C. Barry
Executive Director



CELEBRATE NC PRE-K EXPANSION

Attending pre-kindergarten helps a child's future educational success, earnings, and well-being. In December 2021, the Asheville-Buncombe Preschool Planning Collaborative and we sent [a 60-page report with recommendations](#) to the County Commission for a two-year pilot to stabilize and expand NC Pre-K in our county.

On May 3 the County Commissioners voted unanimously to approve \$3.2 million in funding to strengthen NC Pre-K sites and expand slots.

This pilot addresses ongoing issues with funding, staffing, and training.

We Set Ambitious Goals to:

Fill the gap between per child state funding and the actual cost to local NC Pre-K providers. Increase annual funding per child to \$9,990 (\$2,700 per provider).

Increase licensed lead NC Pre-K teachers pay to the same as K-12 public school teachers. This supports recruitment and retention. It also addresses gender and racial inequities.

Increase salaries of NC Pre-K assistant teachers and supporting continued education.

Create a unified online pre-k application (www.buncombeprek.com). Families can apply to any of the NC Pre-K providers and Head Start in one place (in three languages).

Provide extended program hours for 30 children whose families require more than 6.5 hours of care per day and need year-round care.

Pilot creative transportation solutions for 45 children.

If this pilot project succeeds and is extended, the goal for the Buncombe County Commission would be to double the number of slots in local NC Pre-K programs from 441 to 914 by 2030.



A YWCA pre-k student does a puzzle

CELEBRATE NC PRE-K

Our NC Pre-K staff partners with Dorothy White, the Lead Pre-K Teacher at the [Christine W. Avery Early Learning Center](#). She shared priorities for her pre-k students: "Safety is number one on the pyramid of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. When a child feels safe, they're more prompt to learn. They try new experiences and play with others when they feel safe. They say, "It's okay if I get paint all over me because I feel safe. I feel safe because I'm respected. I can use my words to explain how I feel." And if they can't, the teachers are there to help give them words. There are also pictures for children to show how they're feeling. That gives them the opportunity to succeed. NC Pre-K blesses our community. When kids get a good start here, our community grows. We have a safer, better community because children have that peace that's so foundational for them."



*Miss Dorothy's students
work together*



*Watch Miss Dorothy's
full remarks*



*Watch Jasmine's
full remarks*

Buncombe County Commissioner, Jasmine Beach-Ferrara, explained, "The whole Buncombe County Commission is not just unanimously, but passionately behind the issue of how we expand pre-k in our community. And all the ways we make sure that every single child in Buncombe County has an equal opportunity to thrive from the day they're born. It's how we support working families, not just to get by, but to have a chance to pursue their dreams. Quality early childhood education is the right thing to do. It is the just thing to do. And it's just what we've got to do."

CELEBRATE CHILDREN'S HEALTH

Healthy Bodies

Our Shape Specialist, Natasha Bowden, helped Verner Center for Early Learning design this outdoor play space at their new location. Then she helped bring the plans to life as part of our **Shaping Buncombe** program. Spaces like this create a sense of calm for kids and educators. Children's executive function and ability to read social cues grow when they play with each other in natural spaces. The spaces encourage movement and change to challenge children. The circular path guides them and gets them moving their bodies. We're thrilled to offer NC State's Natural Learning Initiative to child care centers across the county!

Before



After



Healthy Minds

Children's mental health took a hit during the pandemic. Families' time and energy for their children was stretched thin. Early educators report an increase in developmental delays and behavioral issues across child care centers. **The Sunshine Project**, a program of [FIRST WNC](#), offers early educators support when they're at their wit's end. They've tried everything to give a child the right learning setting and integrate them with their peers and nothing has worked. When children are expelled from preschool, it decreases their chances of future educational success. Nationally, children of color face expulsion far more often than white children. Supporting children, families, and educators promotes racial justice and children's learning and socio-emotional development.



CELEBRATE EARLY LITERACY

60,000 books

Over 5,000 Buncombe kids 0 – 5 years old received a free book in the mail every month, totaling over 60,000! We coordinate Dolly Parton's Imagination Library in partnership with Literacy Together and the Black Mountain Rotary Club.

Children like Nell (right) tell us how much it means to be able to read with their family. Dolly makes appearances at all our events to invite families to sign up. And take a selfie while they're at it.

Outreach Director Laura Bernhein at Literacy Together built partnerships with 12 community organizations to sign up families.

More kids are born every year! So we renew our outreach constantly to bring free books to more children. Can you help?



We need to raise \$10,000 to get books to more Buncombe kids.

Donate



Sara sent a note saying, "We love getting a new book in the mail all the time. Here's Dad and Camille reading Tad and Dad."

CELEBRATE EARLY EDUCATORS

The 2022 State of Our Workforce WNC Report found that a lack of affordable child care is the number one reason workers in Buncombe County aren't filling jobs. A shortage of early educators is a big part of the equation. We respond in two ways. We fund the local chapter of Child Care Services Association's **WAGES Program**. This offers educators a salary supplement when they continue their education and remain with the same employer for at least six months. This helps retain trained educators.

We also grow the ranks of early educators through our **Early Childhood Education Workforce Development Program** (WDP). Students complete 24 hours of training and classroom observations. Then they receive a stipend and join a substitute pool in early education centers. Many pursue further education to become full-time early educators. The sub pool means directors don't need to step out of their role into the classroom when a teacher is sick. Centers don't need to close classrooms .

In the 2021-2022 fiscal year
- 18 students from WDP
substituted in early learning
centers
- 11 students received offers
for full-time positions



WDP Coach Amethyst Caruso read an original poem to honor students at their graduation ceremony in June



Participants from high school age to seniors are bringing their passion to early education

CELEBRATE FAMILIES

We value families of all kinds. We believe that supportive and supported families are essential to every child reaching their full potential. Our programs meet families where they are to help their children learn and develop.

Circle of Security™ Parenting invites parents and caregivers to join with others to learn to recognize and meet their child's needs and make sense of their behavior

We began the program and hosted two six-week cohorts. In a survey at the end, participants said they:

- Better understand when their child needed to explore and when they needed reassurance
- Step back to understand their child's behavior before reacting
- Feel confident meeting their child's emotional needs



Adam reflected on his experience in Circle of Security at the end of the eight weeks



Appalachian Wildlife Refuge introduced their friendly ambassadors

Our **Week of the Young Child** kickoff event at Rabbit Rabbit offered kids and families exciting and educational activities. We also invited families to play with their kids and learn about free and low-cost resources. Over 500 people joined in the fun!



We offer groups in English with Asheville City Schools and in Spanish with PODER Emma

Kaleidoscope Play and Learn Groups

Over 200 children from three months to five years old played and learned in our free Kaleidoscope groups. Groups meet weekly and facilitators offer songs, games, early literacy activities, and more. Adults get to compare notes with others caring for young children and get support from trained professionals. Over 75% of participants talk more about feelings with their children after being part of these groups. Over 80% feel more supported in their role with their children.

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

The state of North Carolina provides the majority of our funding through the NC Partnership for Children and the Division of Child Development and Early Education. Private donors and grants provide vital funds for the Early Childhood Education Workforce Development Program, Family Support, Early Literacy, and Outreach. Our income was slightly higher than our expenses in 2021-2022 because we received some grants to cover program expenses in the following fiscal year.

Children's Health Programs

- Child Care Health Consultation
- Shaping Buncombe
- The Sunshine Project

High-Quality Child Care Programs

- Child Care Resources
- Early Childhood Education Workforce Development
- Sustaining Facility Quality
- The WAGE\$ Program

Early Literacy Programs

- Dolly Parton's Imagination Library
- Reach Out and Read

Child Care Affordability Programs

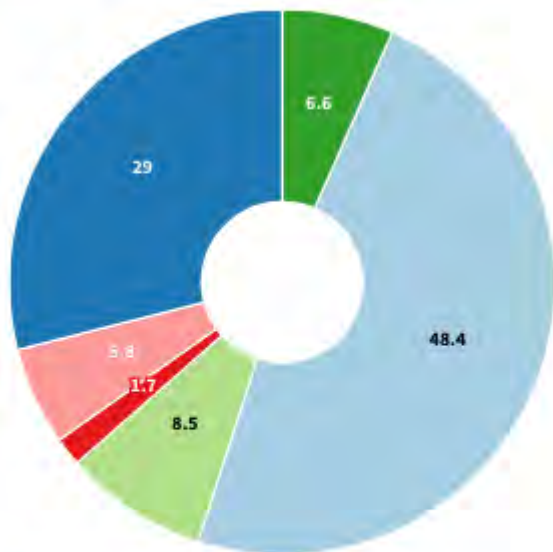
- NC Pre-K
- Child Care Vouchers

Family Support Programs

- Circle of Security Parenting
- Kaleidoscope Play and Learn

Expenses

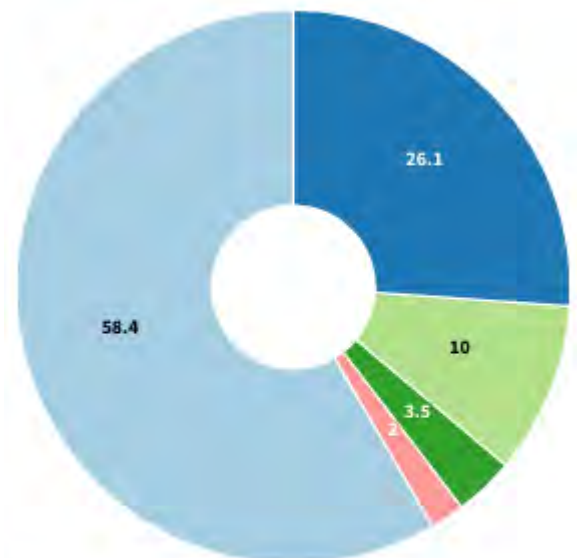
\$5,265,200



- Child Care Affordability
- High-Quality Child Care
- Children's Health
- Administration and Fundraising
- Family Support
- Early Literacy

Income

\$5,363,400



- State
- Federal
- Local
- Private Donations and Grants
- Program Fees and Miscellaneous

Our stupendous staff of 19 at the end of the fiscal year provided the backbone for early education in Buncombe County. [See all our smiling faces here.](#)

DONORS

You generously supported Buncombe
children, families, and educators.
You make all of this possible!

These donors gave between July 1, 2021 and June 30, 2022

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at Ben Fehsenfeld: ben@buncombepfc.org.

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Next Year's List. Donate!**
www.buncombepfc.org/give

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MAHEC
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