THE STATE OF CHILD CARE IN BUNCOMBE COUNTY SEPTEMBER 2025

Buncombe Partnership for Children

a partner in the Smart Start network™

OVERVIEW

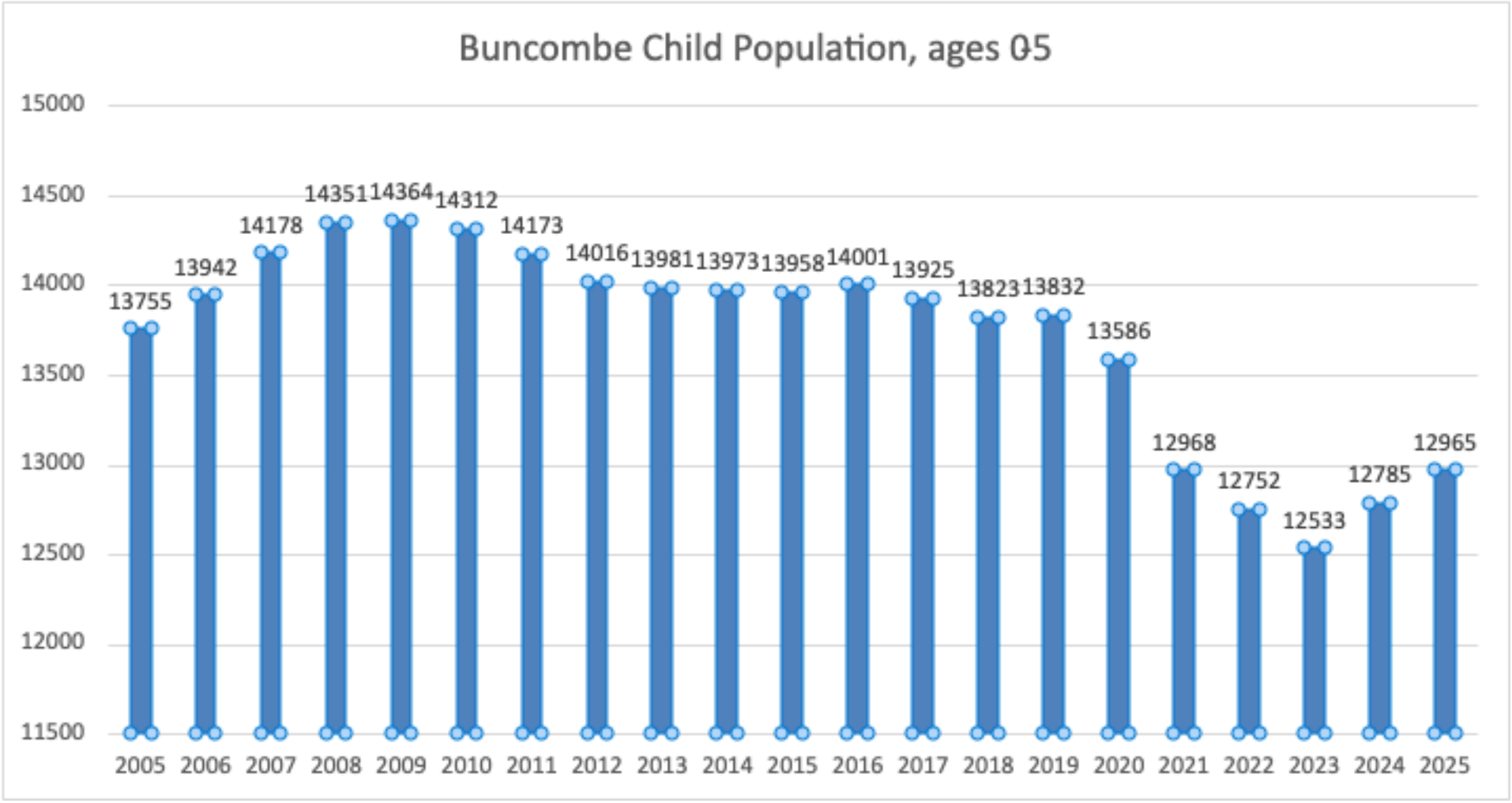
- NC ECE Task Force
- Child Demographics
- Types of Care
- COVID Stabilization Grants
- Hurricane Helene Recovery
- Quality
- Availability
- Affordability
- Workforce
- Child Health

TASK FORCE RELEASES REPORT

On July 1, the North Carolina Task Force on Child Care and Early Education released its Interim Report outlining six recommendations to make high-quality child care more accessible, affordable, and sustainable in North Carolina.

1. Set a statewide child care subsidy reimbursement rate floor
2. Develop approaches to offer non-salary benefits for child care professionals
3. Explore partnerships with the UNC system, community colleges, and K-12 schools to increase access to child care for public employees and students at public institutions
4. Explore subsidized or free child care for child care teachers
5. Link existing workforce compensation and support programs for early childhood professionals
6. Explore the creation of a child care endowment

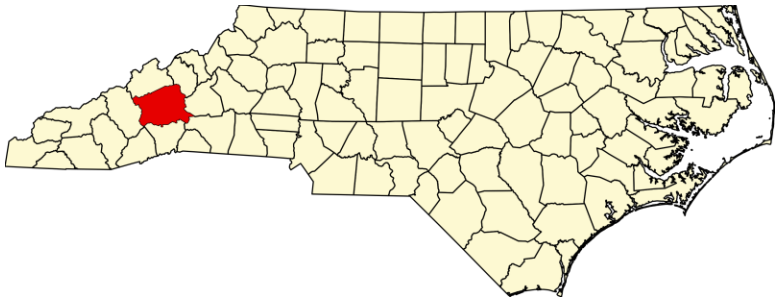
A final report with additional recommendations will be submitted to Gov. Stein in December 2025.



Current number of children birth through 5 years old (and not age eligible for kindergarten) = 12,965

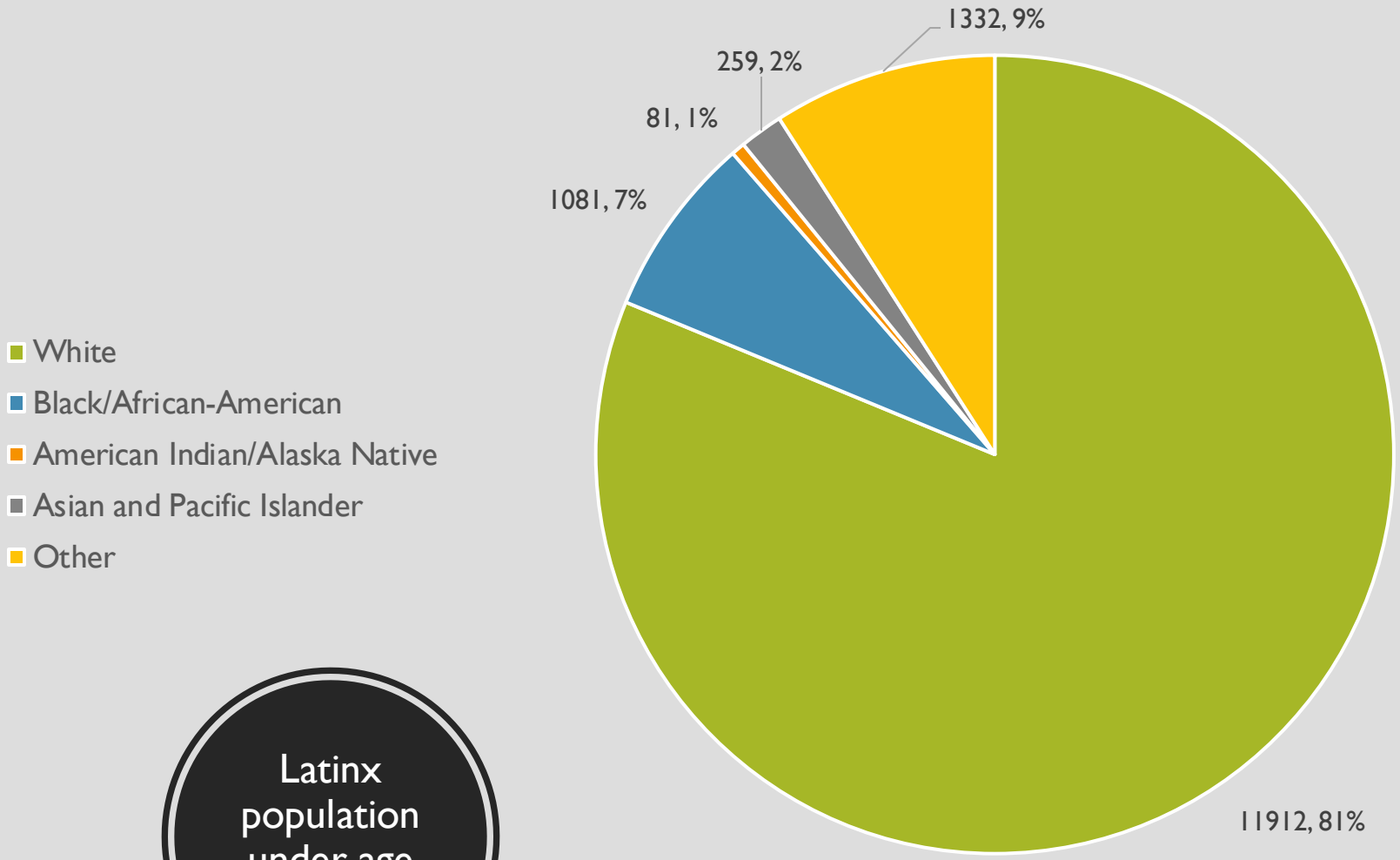
Buncombe child poverty = 16.4%

Buncombe County



	Children in Care	Infants	1 yr olds	2 yr olds	3 yr olds	4 yr olds	5 yr old PS	Total
A	Children in licensed care	176	414	568	834	954	716	3,662
B	Total available child population	2439	2423	2415	2440	2411	837	12,965
C	**% of all children served (A/B)**	**7%**	**17%**	**24%**	**34%**	**40%**	**86%**	**28%**
D	# of children not being served (does not imply need) B-A	2,263	2,009	1,847	1,606	1,457	121	9,303

Buncombe children 0-5 by race, 2025



Latinx population under age 5 = 20%

TYPES OF EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

All care is regulated by NC Division of Child Development and Early Education (NC DCDEE):

- Licensed programs (more than 4 hours)
- Part-day, unlicensed regulated programs (4 hours or less)

Types of licensed programs:

- Child Care Centers – 97 (82 serving 0-5)
- Family Child Care Homes (FCCH) – 6
- Afterschool only licensed programs (ages 5-12) – 15
- Total licensed programs (0-12) - 103

Publicly-funded programs that make care more affordable for parents:

- Head Start (3- to 5-year-olds)
- Early Head Start (0- to 2-year-olds)
- NC Pre Kindergarten (4-year-olds)

LOSS OF DCDEE STABILIZATION GRANTS

Stabilization grants came from American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) in response to COVID-19. $805M in grants were administered statewide by DCDEE to licensed child care providers in NC. Quarterly payments began Oct, 2021; reduced several times; ended Mar, 2025.

- Total Buncombe jobs impacted = 1,144
- Total Buncombe child care capacity impacted = 6,855

Buncombe dollars paid through September 2024:

- **All payments = $24,964,343**
  - **Fixed cost payments = $11,030,144***
  - **Compensation supports = $13,934,199**

**Grants based on capacity, subsidized child care enrollment, program star rating, infant/toddler enrollment, and community context using Social Vulnerability Index*

HELENE'S IMPACTS ON LOCAL ECE

Most programs closed for a month+

8 locations with significant physical damage. Of the 8, one program opened on June 15, 2025 and another remains closed but is working to reopen soon.

These programs received significant financial support through Recovery Grants from the Community Foundation of WNC, Dogwood Health Trust, an allocation from the NC General Assembly through the North Carolina Partnership for Children, and other various sources.

Buncombe Partnership for Children alone received $4,531,000 in grants to distribute to local child care providers for Helene lost revenue, workforce retention, repairs, and mental health supports.

ECE ENROLLMENT IMPACTS

Sept 26, 2024	Jan 10, 2025
3710	3688

- **11 programs lost more than 10% enrollment:**
  - 6 home-based programs
  - Building Blocks (closed)
  - Christine Avery (closed)
  - Kathy's Kiddyland
  - All God's Children (closed)
  - East Asheville Academy

Data includes 66 child care facilities that applied for Dogwood Health Trust funding for lost revenue and teacher retention bonuses.

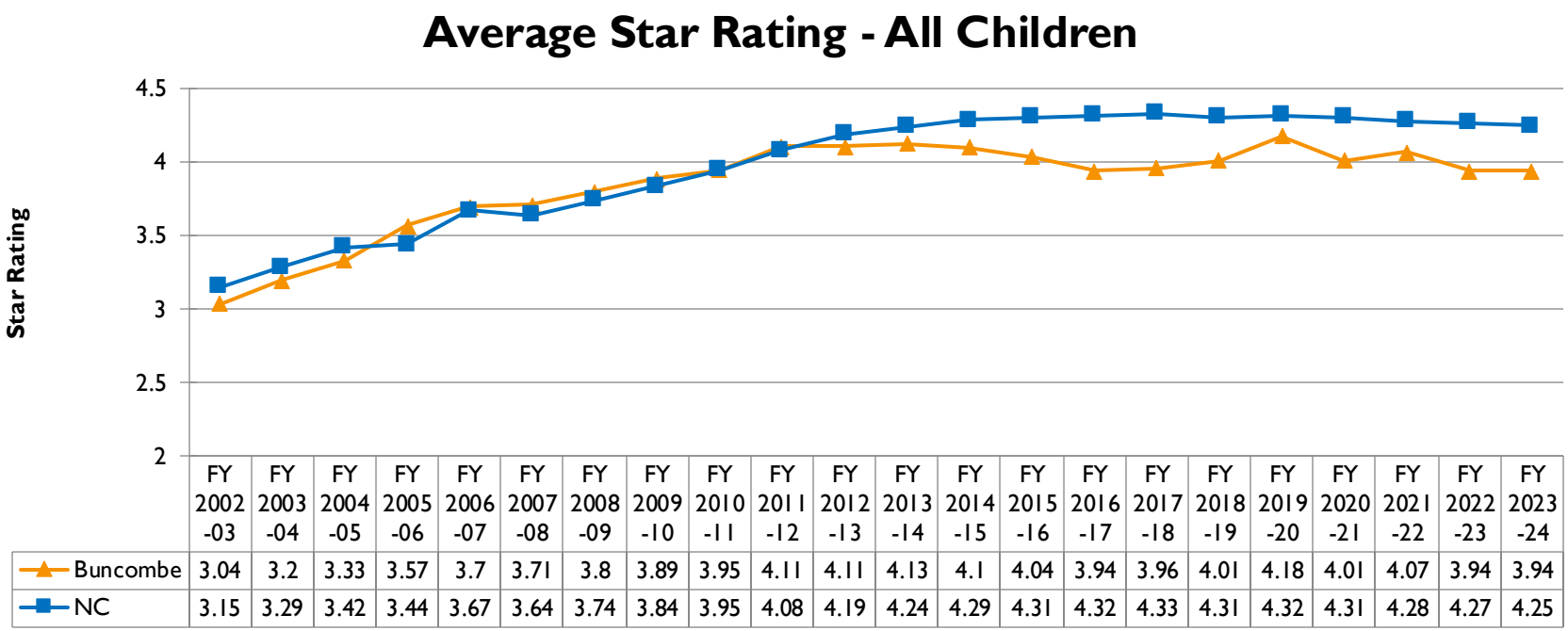
PATHWAYS TO THE STARS

Where Quality and Choice Meet

How is quality defined in NC?

Pathways to the Stars became effective July 1, 2025 and includes:

- Offering a choice of **three pathways** to demonstrate quality and earn a 2-5 Star Rated License.
- **Updated education standards** for early childhood educators to expand options; and
- Adding standards for both educators and facilities that support **continuous quality improvement** and **family/community engagement and leadership** best practices.
- Religious-sponsored programs (GS110s) do not receive a rating, unless they choose to apply.
- The QRIS (Quality Rating Improvement System, 2-5 stars) is voluntary. Licensed facilities may choose to opt-out and receive a one-star rating.

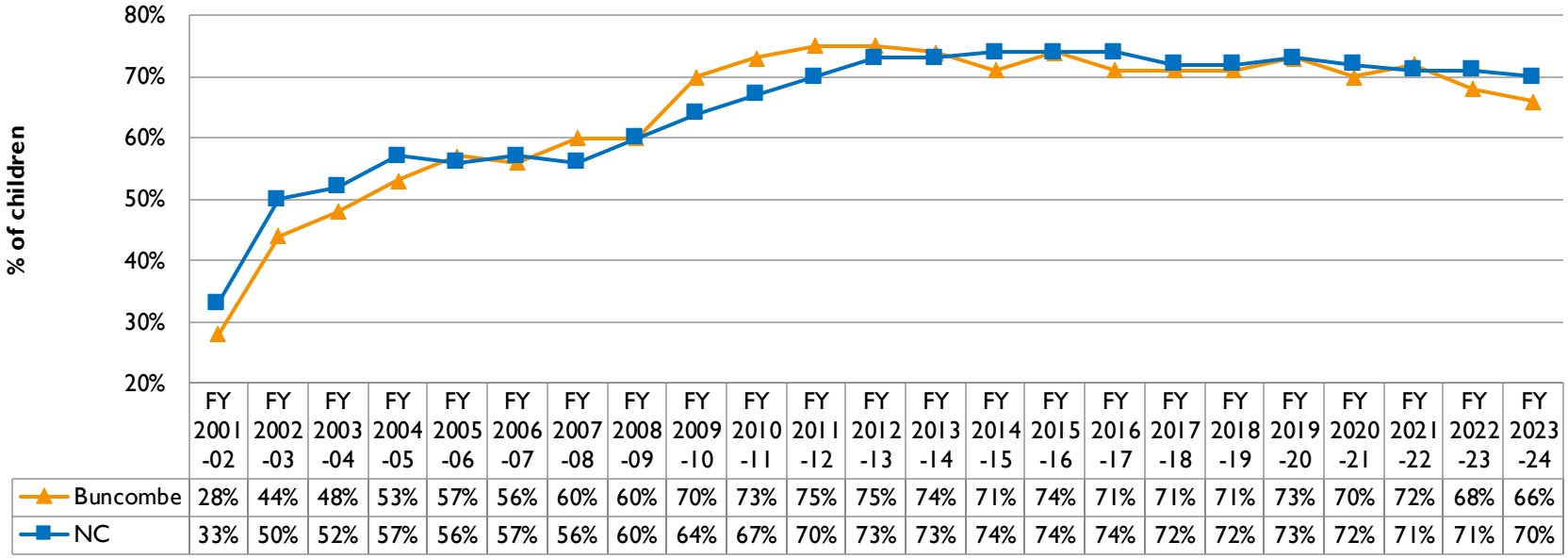


	FY 2002-03	FY 2003-04	FY 2004-05	FY 2005-06	FY 2006-07	FY 2007-08	FY 2008-09	FY 2009-10	FY 2010-11	FY 2011-12	FY 2012-13	FY 2013-14	FY 2014-15	FY 2015-16	FY 2016-17	FY 2017-18	FY 2018-19	FY 2019-20	FY 2020-21	FY 2021-22	FY 2022-23	FY 2023-24
Buncombe	3.04	3.2	3.33	3.57	3.7	3.71	3.8	3.89	3.95	4.11	4.11	4.13	4.1	4.04	3.94	3.96	4.01	4.18	4.01	4.07	3.94	3.94
NC	3.15	3.29	3.42	3.44	3.67	3.64	3.74	3.84	3.95	4.08	4.19	4.24	4.29	4.31	4.32	4.33	4.31	4.32	4.31	4.28	4.27	4.25

CHILD CARE QUALITY

PLA40a – Buncombe falls below the minimum standard

Children in High Quality Care - All Children



	FY 2001-02	FY 2002-03	FY 2003-04	FY 2004-05	FY 2005-06	FY 2006-07	FY 2007-08	FY 2008-09	FY 2009-10	FY 2010-11	FY 2011-12	FY 2012-13	FY 2013-14	FY 2014-15	FY 2015-16	FY 2016-17	FY 2017-18	FY 2018-19	FY 2019-20	FY 2020-21	FY 2021-22	FY 2022-23	FY 2023-24
Buncombe	28%	44%	48%	53%	57%	56%	60%	60%	70%	73%	75%	75%	74%	71%	74%	71%	71%	71%	73%	70%	72%	68%	66%
NC	33%	50%	52%	57%	56%	57%	56%	60%	64%	67%	70%	73%	73%	74%	74%	74%	72%	72%	73%	72%	71%	71%	70%

CHILD CARE QUALITY

PLA40b – Buncombe falls below the minimum standard

HOW TO FIND CARE?

1) Find Child Care NC, the **NEW** searchable database offered by the NC Child Care Resource & Referral Council

findchildcarenc.org

2) Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) website

ncchildcare.ncdhhs.gov

3) Mountain Child Care Connections

Phone referrals and quality information

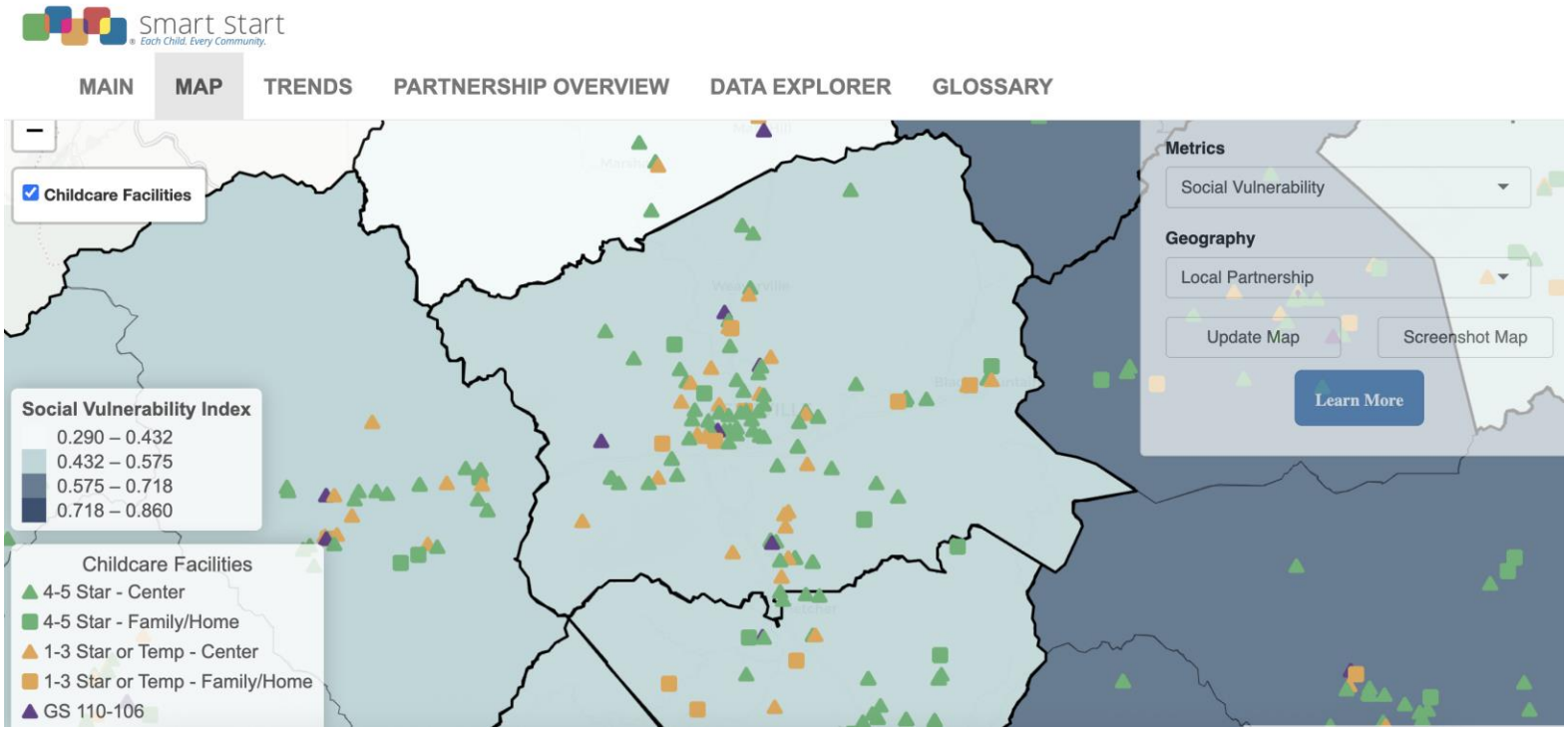
877-752-5955

4) Buncombe Pre-K buncombeprek.com

Apply for NC Pre-K and Head Start

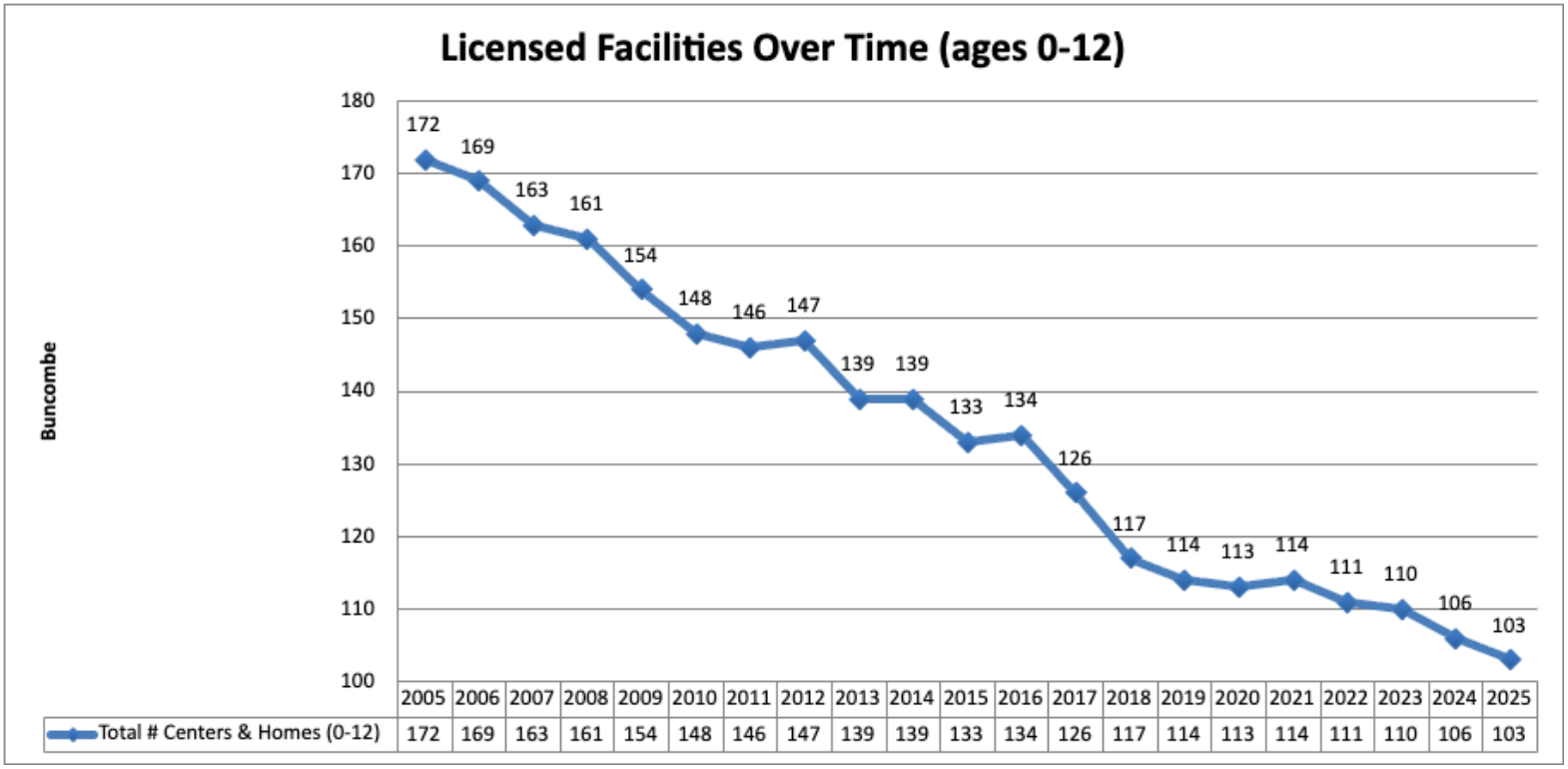
5) Word of mouth/ recommendations from friends and family

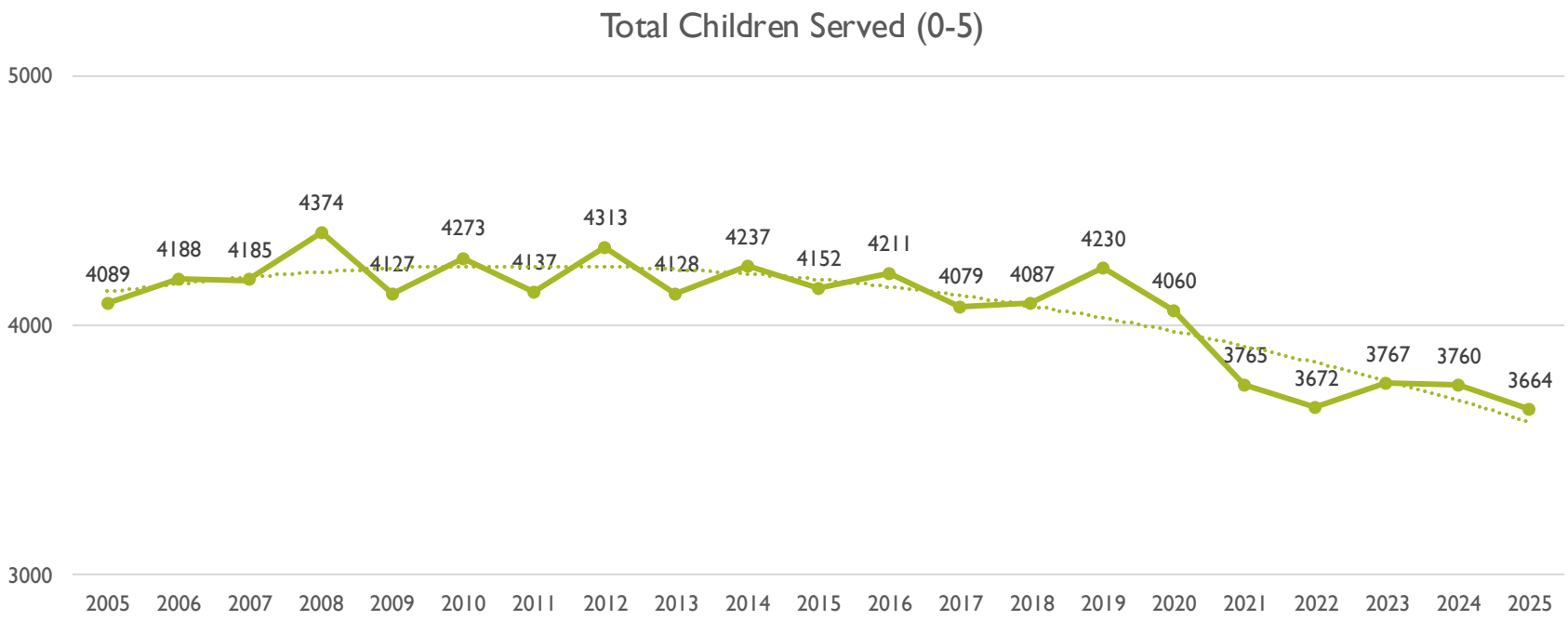
Data Visualization Tools: Location of child care centers



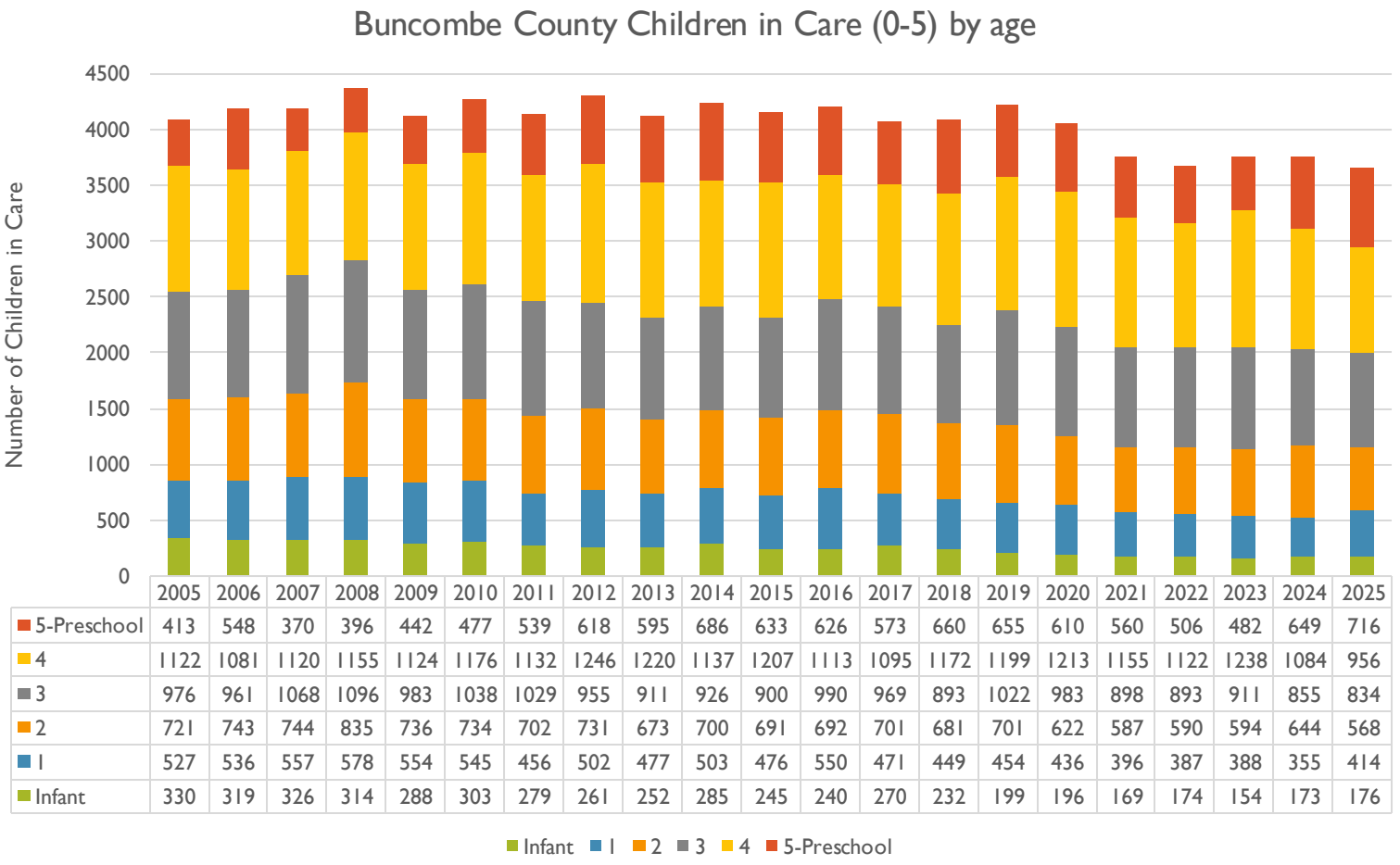
	Center			Family Child Care Home					
Report Date	Employees	Children Served	# of facilities	Employees	Children Served	# of facilities	**Total Employees**	**Total Children**	**Total Facilities**
Sep-05	860	6261	125	63	292	47	**923**	**6553**	**172**
Sep-06	788	5041	121	57	281	48	**845**	**5322**	**169**
Sep-07	938	5583	120	51	248	43	**989**	**5831**	**163**
Sep-08	1144	5753	117	44	247	44	**1188**	**6000**	**161**
Sep-09	1057	5761	116	47	235	38	**1104**	**5996**	**154**
Sep-10	1028	5666	114	38	221	34	**1066**	**5887**	**148**
Sep-11	994	5444	113	43	213	33	**1037**	**5657**	**146**
Sep-12	1043	5720	113	49	210	34	**1092**	**5930**	**147**
Sep-13	1010	5432	109	40	186	30	**1050**	**5618**	**139**
Sep-14	1087	5521	108	44	192	31	**1131**	**5713**	**139**
Sep-15	1003	5380	106	41	166	27	**1044**	**5546**	**133**
Sep-16	1101	5408	107	37	161	27	**1138**	**5569**	**134**
Sep-17	984	5376	105	27	130	21	**1011**	**5506**	**126**
Sep-18	995	5282	101	18	97	16	**1013**	**5379**	**117**
Sep-19	1008	5497	99	17	81	15	**1025**	**5578**	**114**
Sep-20	927	5239	99	16	79	14	**943**	**5318**	**113**
Sep-21	848	4971	101	14	59	13	**862**	**5030**	**114**
Sep-22	823	4637	100	13	62	11	**836**	**4699**	**111**
Sep-23	980	4640	99	11	60	11	**991**	**4700**	**110**
Sep-24	1033	4840	99	7	51	7	**1040**	**4891**	**106**
Aug-25	1061	4628	97	7	35	6	**1068**	**4663**	**103**

WORKFORCE, ENROLLMENT & FACILITIES LICENSED PROGRAMS (AGES 0-12)

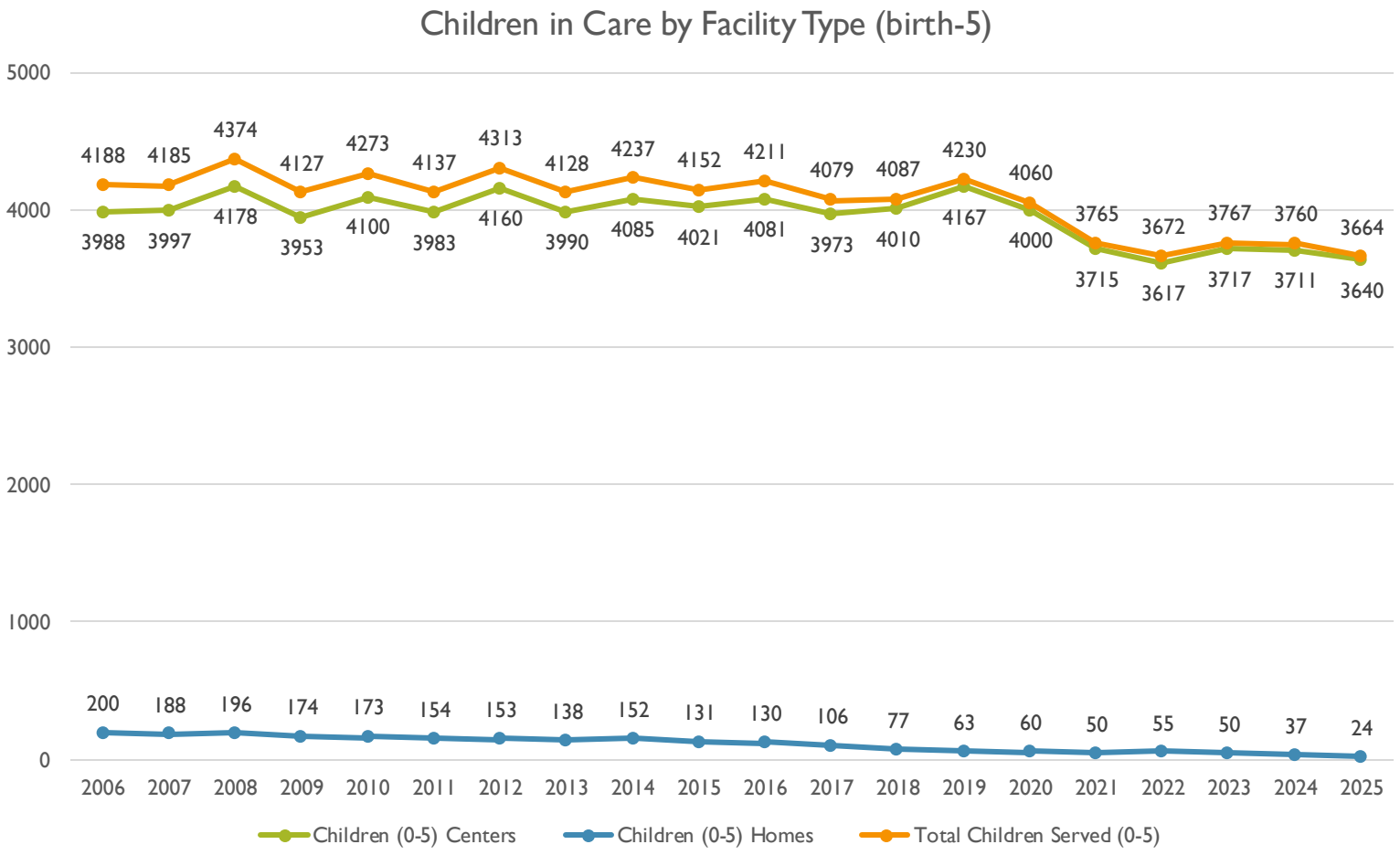

Licensed Facilities Over Time (ages 0-12)
Buncombe
180
170
160
150
140
130
120
110
100
172
169
163
161
154
148
146
147
139
139
133
134
126
117
114
113
114
111
110
106
103
2005 2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023 2024 2025
Total # Centers & Homes (0-12)
172 169 163 161 154 148 146 147 139 139 133 134 126 117 114 113 114 111 110 106 103

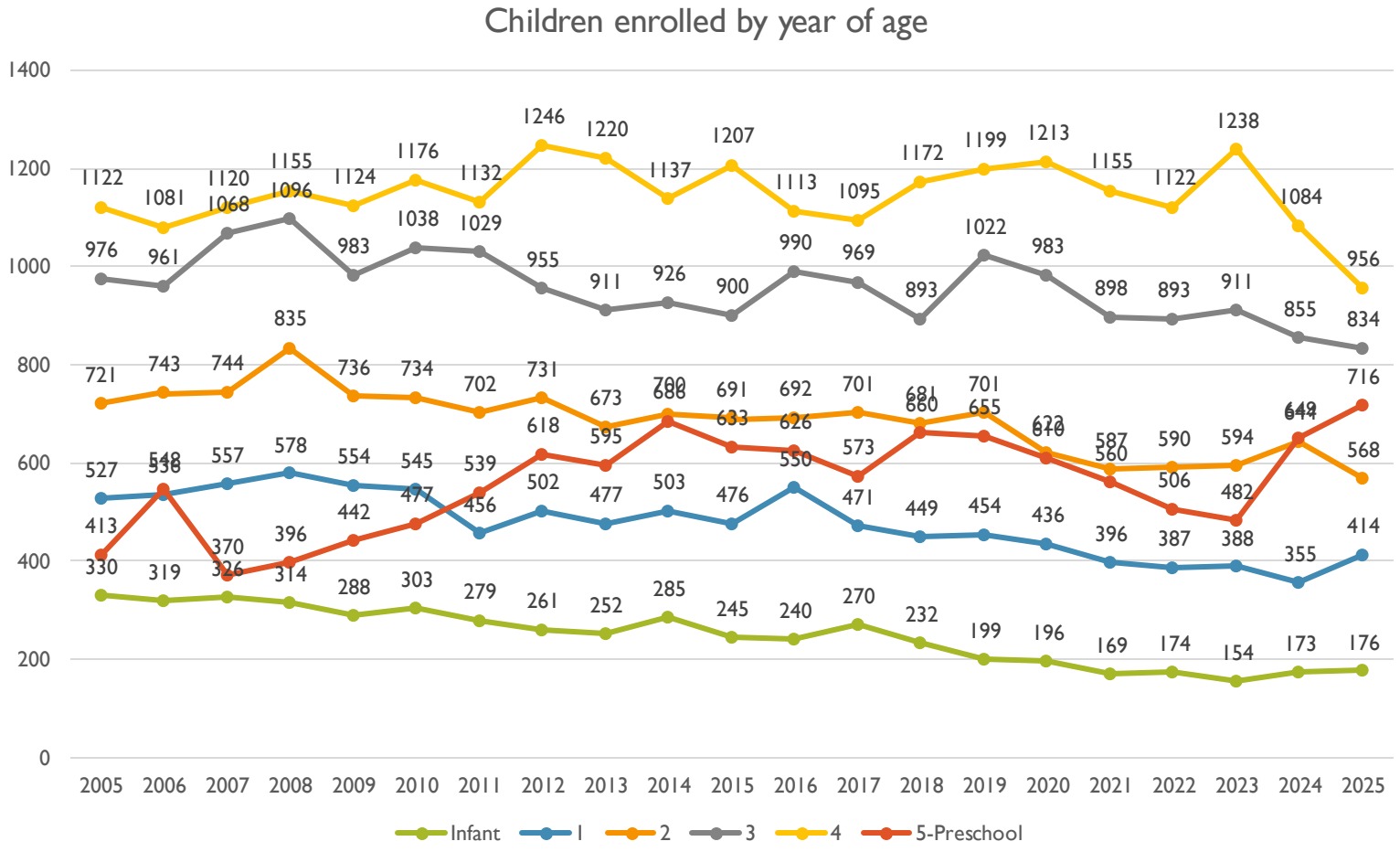


BUNCOMBE ENROLLMENT OVER TIME IN LICENSED FACILITIES (AGES 0-5)



	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
5-Preschool	413	548	370	396	442	477	539	618	595	686	633	626	573	660	655	610	560	506	482	649	716
4	1122	1081	1120	1155	1124	1176	1132	1246	1220	1137	1207	1113	1095	1172	1199	1213	1155	1122	1238	1084	956
3	976	961	1068	1096	983	1038	1029	955	911	926	900	990	969	893	1022	983	898	893	911	855	834
2	721	743	744	835	736	734	702	731	673	700	691	692	701	681	701	622	587	590	594	644	568
1	527	536	557	578	554	545	456	502	477	503	476	550	471	449	454	436	396	387	388	355	414
Infant	330	319	326	314	288	303	279	261	252	285	245	240	270	232	199	196	169	174	154	173	176


Children in Care by Facility Type (birth-5)
5000
4000
3000
2000
1000
0
4188 4185 4374 4127 4273 4137 4313 4128 4237 4152 4211 4079 4087 4230 4060 3765 3672 3767 3760 3664
3988 3997 4178 3953 4100 3983 4160 3990 4085 4021 4081 3973 4010 4167 4000 3715 3617 3717 3711 3640
200 188 196 174 173 154 153 138 152 131 130 106 77 63 60 50 55 50 37 24
2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023 2024 2025
Children (0-5) Centers
Children (0-5) Homes
Total Children Served (0-5)


Children enrolled by year of age
1400
1200
1000
800
600
400
200
0
2005 2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023 2024 2025
Infant
1
2
3
4
5-Preschool

SLOTS AVAILABLE BY SHIFT

Many parents have employment that doesn't adhere to the standard Monday-Friday, 9-to-5 work schedule. Besides working outside of normal business hours, a subsection of these parents may also work hours that vary week to week. Despite the growing need for nonstandard-hours care, there has been very little research on how states and communities are supporting families in this situation.

In Buncombe County:

2 family child care homes are licensed to serve a total of **16** children during second shift.

0 family child care homes are licensed to serve children during third shift.

During the month of August 2025 the most recent report available, **NO five- to twelve-year-old** children were being served with second shift care.

No child care centers are licensed to serve children for second or third shift.

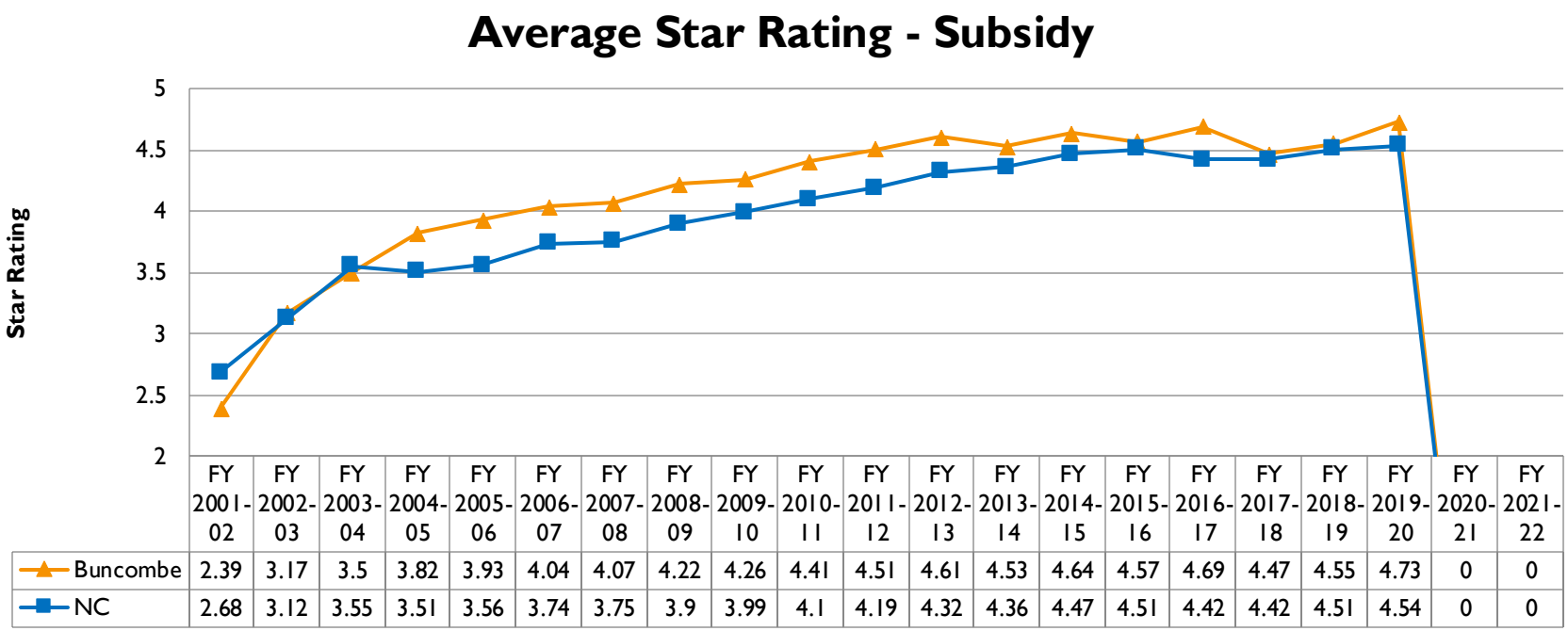
AFFORDABILITY

- In Buncombe County, the average annual cost of 5-star center based care for an infant is $13,656 and $12,915 in a family child care home (2025).
- There are several options to help families pay for care if they meet income eligibility and other guidelines, including Early Head Start, Head Start, NC Pre-Kindergarten, and child care subsidies (buncombepfc.org/childcare/).
- Parents receiving child care subsidies must pay parent fees of 10% of family gross income and the difference between the voucher reimbursement rate and the advertised cost of the slot, or the differential rate. This is a barrier to families for payment and a barrier to centers for collection.
- Wrap-around care (extended hours before or after the official program hours) is an additional cost to families and may not be available depending on the program site, sometimes making care difficult for working parents.

Facility	Age Served	One Star	Two Star	Three Star	Four Star	Five Star
Child Care Center	Infant-Toddler Rate	$ 379	$ 398	$ 876	$ 960	$ 1100
	2 Year Old Rate	$ 356	$ 374	$ 844	$ 998	$ 1014
	3-5 Year Old Rate	$ 335	$ 351	$ 927	$ 958	$ 989
Family Child Care Home	Infant Rate	$ 379	$ 398	$ 909	$ 919	$1,022
	1 Year Old Rate	$ 379	$ 398	$ 867	$ 891	$1,023
	2 Year Old Rate	$ 356	$ 374	$ 877	$ 886	$ 904
	3-5 Year Old Rate	$ 335	$ 351	$ 867	$ 868	$ 957

BUNCOMBE SUBSIDY MARKET RATES (AS OF OCT 1, 2023)

Most recent available

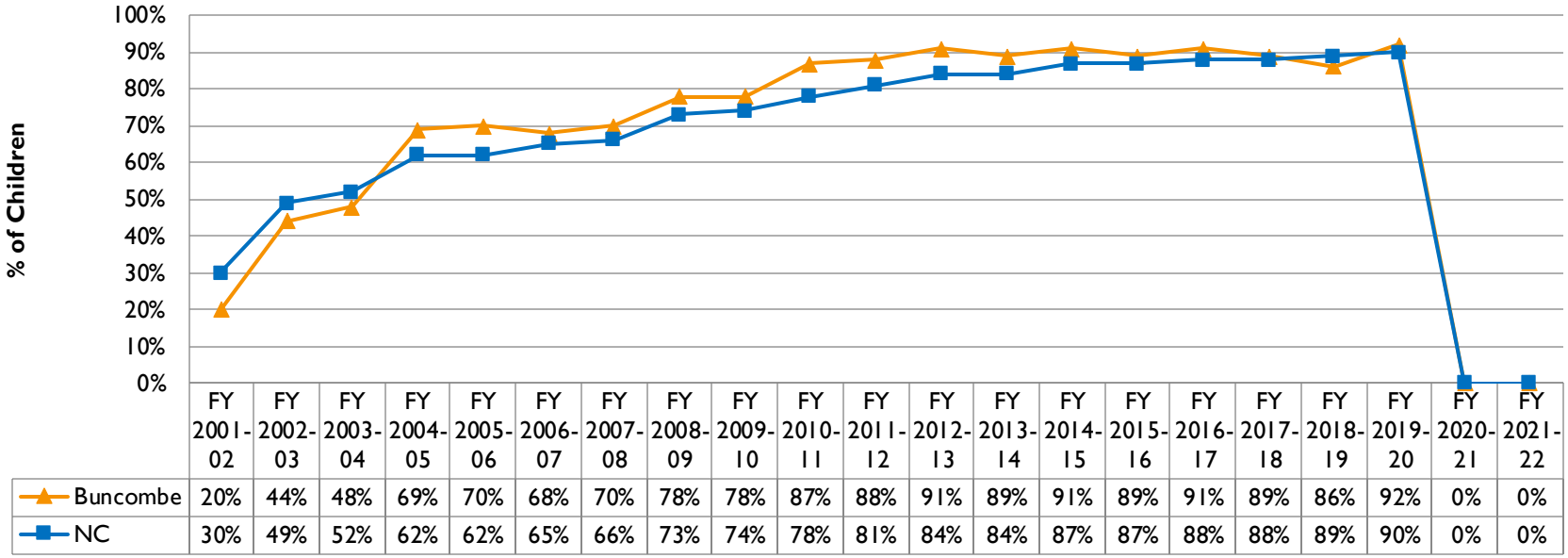


	FY 2001-02	FY 2002-03	FY 2003-04	FY 2004-05	FY 2005-06	FY 2006-07	FY 2007-08	FY 2008-09	FY 2009-10	FY 2010-11	FY 2011-12	FY 2012-13	FY 2013-14	FY 2014-15	FY 2015-16	FY 2016-17	FY 2017-18	FY 2018-19	FY 2019-20	FY 2020-21	FY 2021-22
Buncombe	2.39	3.17	3.5	3.82	3.93	4.04	4.07	4.22	4.26	4.41	4.51	4.61	4.53	4.64	4.57	4.69	4.47	4.55	4.73	0	0
NC	2.68	3.12	3.55	3.51	3.56	3.74	3.75	3.9	3.99	4.1	4.19	4.32	4.36	4.47	4.51	4.42	4.42	4.51	4.54	0	0

CHILD CARE QUALITY

PLA50a – Buncombe data is not available past FY 19-20

Subsidy - % of children served in High Quality Care



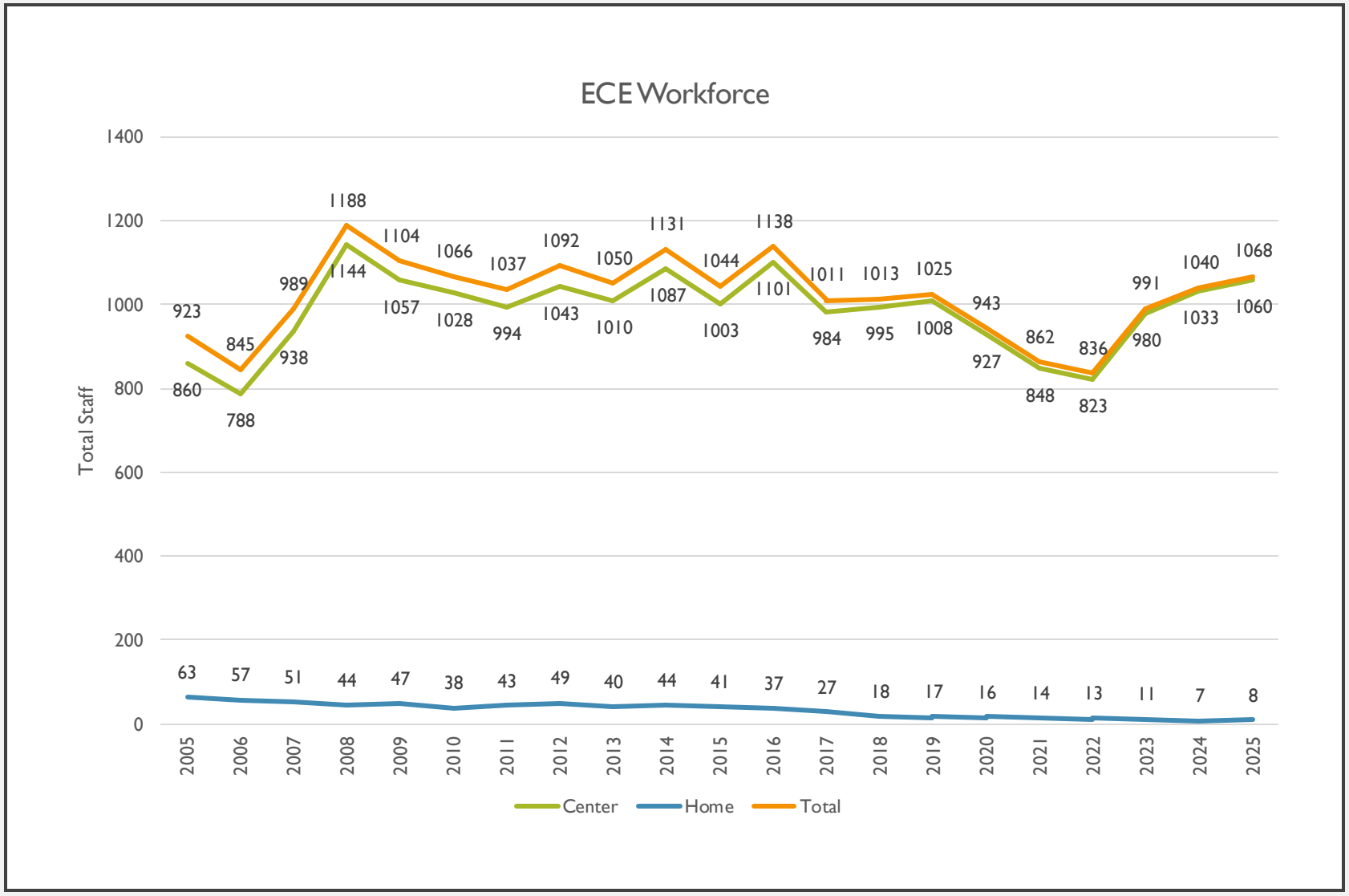
	FY 2001-02	FY 2002-03	FY 2003-04	FY 2004-05	FY 2005-06	FY 2006-07	FY 2007-08	FY 2008-09	FY 2009-10	FY 2010-11	FY 2011-12	FY 2012-13	FY 2013-14	FY 2014-15	FY 2015-16	FY 2016-17	FY 2017-18	FY 2018-19	FY 2019-20	FY 2020-21	FY 2021-22
Buncombe	20%	44%	48%	69%	70%	68%	70%	78%	78%	87%	88%	91%	89%	91%	89%	91%	89%	86%	92%	0%	0%
NC	30%	49%	52%	62%	62%	65%	66%	73%	74%	78%	81%	84%	84%	87%	87%	88%	88%	89%	90%	0%	0%

CHILD CARE QUALITY

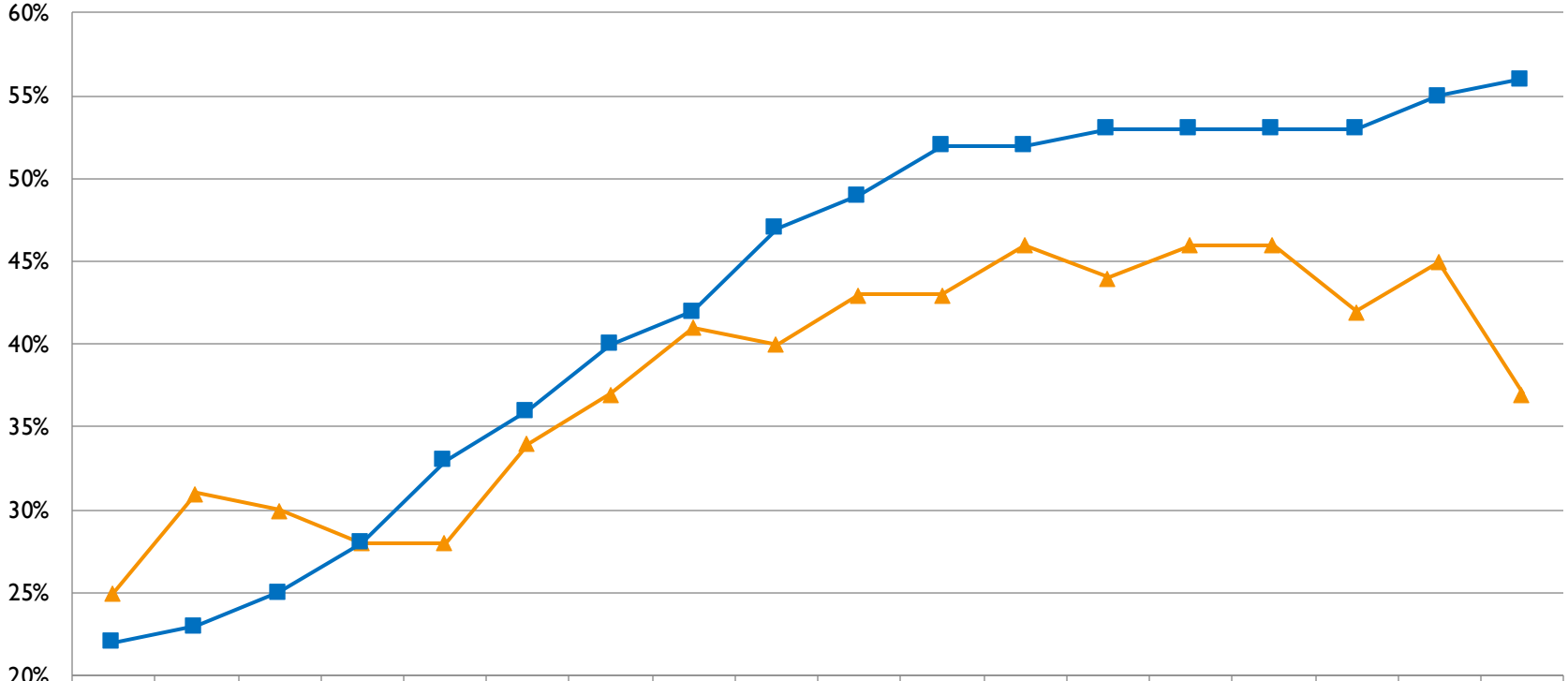
PLA50b – Buncombe data is not available past FY 19-20

THE BUNCOMBE WORKFORCE

- Number of teachers = 839
- Number of administrators = 86
- Number of support staff = 68
- The starting wage for teachers in Buncombe County is $16/hr. with the highest salary at $20/hr.
- The starting wage for assistant teachers in Buncombe County is $15/hr. with the highest salary at $17/hr.
- WAGE$ salary supplement program participants = 149 teacher/administrators in 63 facilities
- Turnover rate of WAGE$ recipients = 18%
- TEACH Early Childhood scholarship program = 58 participants in 31 facilities
- Facilities receiving unrestricted Smart Start grants from Buncombe Partnership for Children to maintain high quality = 61


ECE Workforce
Total Staff
1400
1200
1000
800
600
400
200
0
923
845
989
1188
1104
1066
1037
1092
1050
1131
1044
1138
1011
1013
1025
943
862
836
991
1040
1068
860
788
938
1144
1057
1028
994
1043
1010
1087
1003
1101
984
995
1008
927
848
823
980
1033
1060
63
57
51
44
47
38
43
49
40
44
41
37
27
18
17
16
14
13
11
7
8
2005
2006
2007
2008
2009
2010
2011
2012
2013
2014
2015
2016
2017
2018
2019
2020
2021
2022
2023
2024
2025
Center
Home
Total

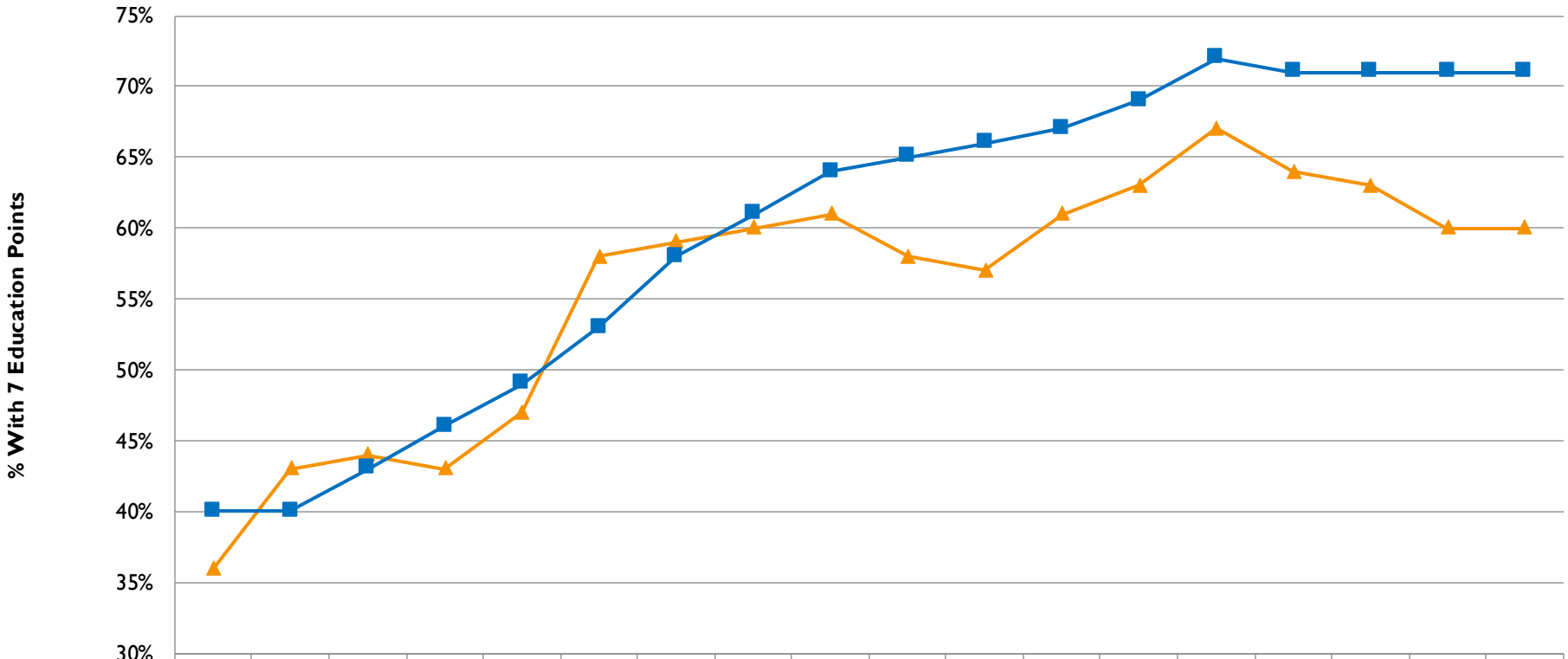
Lead Teacher Education



	FY 2006-07	FY 2007-08	FY 2008-09	FY 2009-10	FY 2010-11	FY 2011-12	FY 2012-13	FY 2013-14	FY 2014-15	FY 2015-16	FY 2016-17	FY 2017-18	FY 2018-19	FY 2019-20	FY 2020-21	FY 2021-22	FY 2022-23	FY 2023-24
Buncombe	25%	31%	30%	28%	28%	34%	37%	41%	40%	43%	43%	46%	44%	46%	46%	42%	45%	37%
NC	22%	23%	25%	28%	33%	36%	40%	42%	47%	49%	52%	52%	53%	53%	53%	53%	55%	56%

- EDU10 – Percent of children enrolled in 1-5 star centers that have at least 75% of lead teachers with associate's degrees. Buncombe falls below the minimum standard.

Administrator Education



	FY 2006-07	FY 2007-08	FY 2008-09	FY 2009-10	FY 2010-11	FY 2011-12	FY 2012-13	FY 2013-14	FY 2014-15	FY 2015-16	FY 2016-17	FY 2017-18	FY 2018-19	FY 2019-20	FY 2020-21	FY 2021-22	FY 2022-23	FY 2023-24
Buncombe	36%	43%	44%	43%	47%	58%	59%	60%	61%	58%	57%	61%	63%	67%	64%	63%	60%	60%
NC	40%	40%	43%	46%	49%	53%	58%	61%	64%	65%	66%	67%	69%	72%	71%	71%	71%	71%

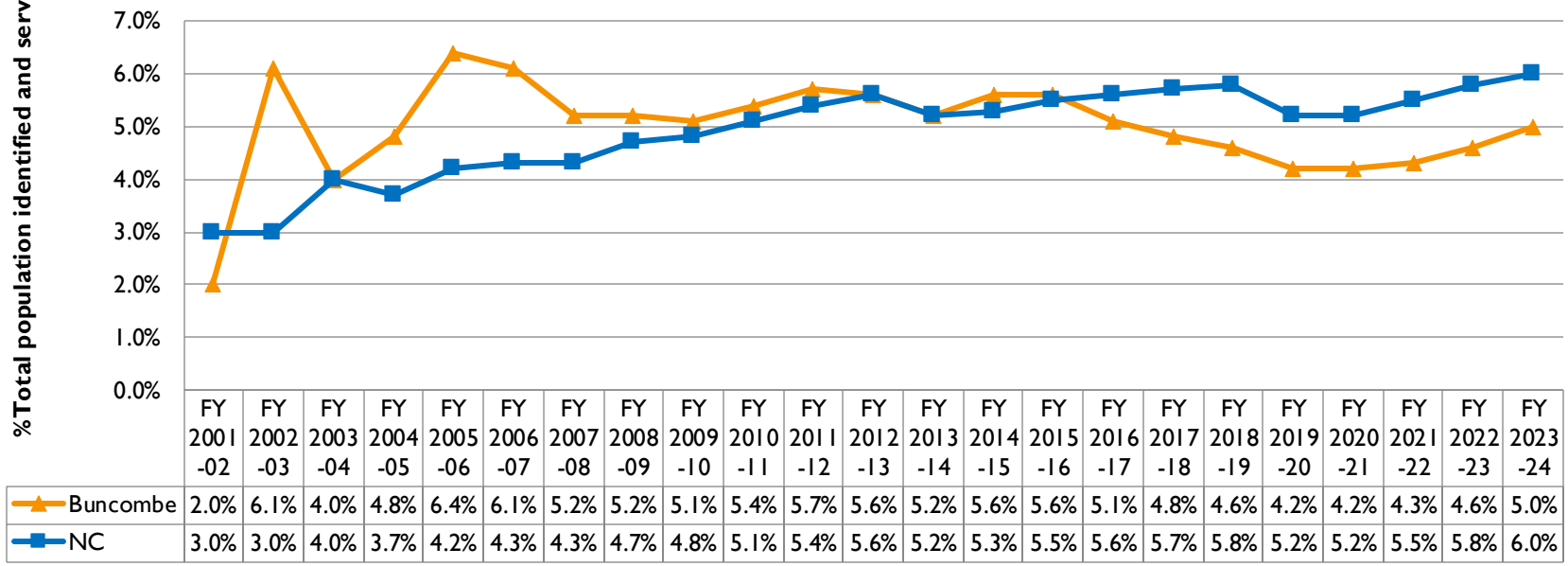
- EDU20 –Percent of children enrolled in 1-5 star centers that have directors with college degrees. Buncombe meets minimum standard.

CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL HEALTHCARE NEEDS

A variety of support programs are available for families based on child eligibility and age, including:

- Children's Developmental Services Agency
- Exceptional Children's Program
- Child Care Health Consultants
- The SUNSHINE Project
- Family Support Network

Early Intervention (ages 0-2)

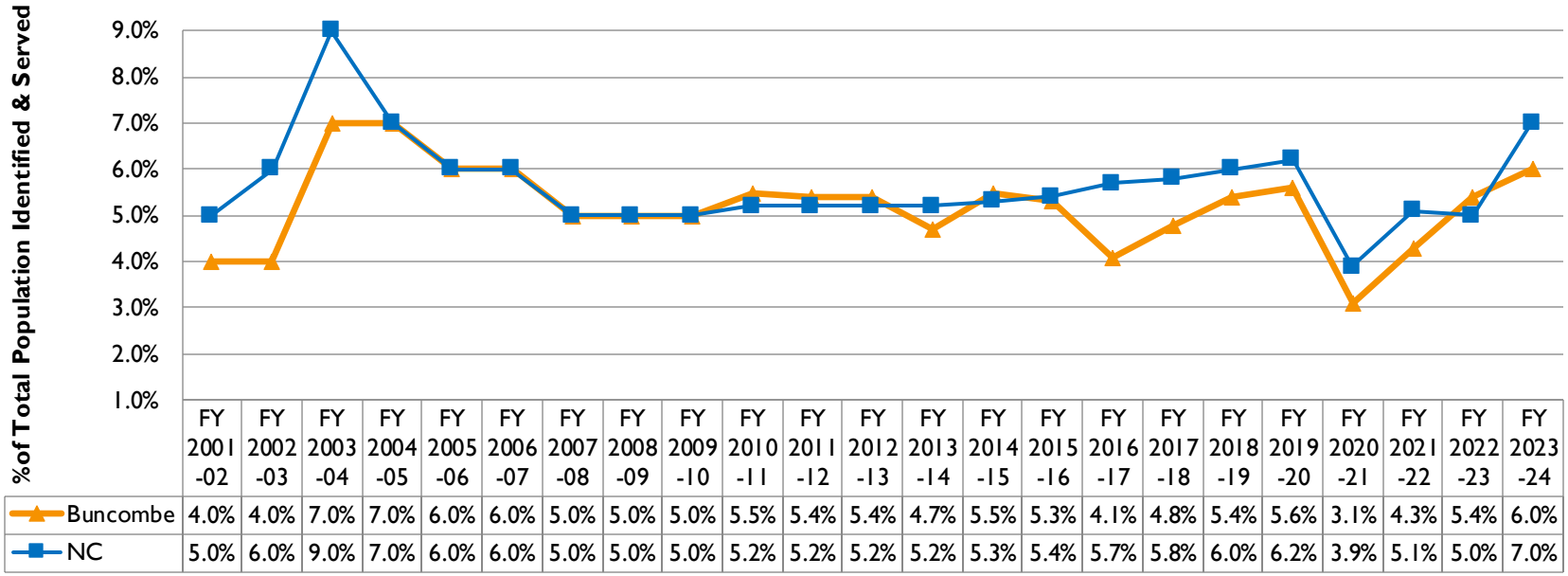


	FY 2001-02	FY 2002-03	FY 2003-04	FY 2004-05	FY 2005-06	FY 2006-07	FY 2007-08	FY 2008-09	FY 2009-10	FY 2010-11	FY 2011-12	FY 2012-13	FY 2013-14	FY 2014-15	FY 2015-16	FY 2016-17	FY 2017-18	FY 2018-19	FY 2019-20	FY 2020-21	FY 2021-22	FY 2022-23	FY 2023-24
Buncombe	2.0%	6.1%	4.0%	4.8%	6.4%	6.1%	5.2%	5.2%	5.1%	5.4%	5.7%	5.6%	5.2%	5.6%	5.6%	5.1%	4.8%	4.6%	4.2%	4.2%	4.3%	4.6%	5.0%
NC	3.0%	3.0%	4.0%	3.7%	4.2%	4.3%	4.3%	4.7%	4.8%	5.1%	5.4%	5.6%	5.2%	5.3%	5.5%	5.6%	5.7%	5.8%	5.2%	5.2%	5.5%	5.8%	6.0%

HEALTH

H10a – Buncombe is within the expected range

Early Intervention (ages 3-5)



	FY 2001-02	FY 2002-03	FY 2003-04	FY 2004-05	FY 2005-06	FY 2006-07	FY 2007-08	FY 2008-09	FY 2009-10	FY 2010-11	FY 2011-12	FY 2012-13	FY 2013-14	FY 2014-15	FY 2015-16	FY 2016-17	FY 2017-18	FY 2018-19	FY 2019-20	FY 2020-21	FY 2021-22	FY 2022-23	FY 2023-24
Buncombe	4.0%	4.0%	7.0%	7.0%	6.0%	6.0%	5.0%	5.0%	5.0%	5.5%	5.4%	5.4%	4.7%	5.5%	5.3%	4.1%	4.8%	5.4%	5.6%	3.1%	4.3%	5.4%	6.0%
NC	5.0%	6.0%	9.0%	7.0%	6.0%	6.0%	5.0%	5.0%	5.0%	5.2%	5.2%	5.2%	5.2%	5.3%	5.4%	5.7%	5.8%	6.0%	6.2%	3.9%	5.1%	5.0%	7.0%

HEALTH

H10b – Buncombe is within the expected range

RESOURCES

- NCDHHS Division of Child Development & Early Education
- NC Partnership for Children (Smart Start)
- NC Early Childhood Foundation
- NC Early Education Coalition
- NC Child
- NC Association for the Education of Young Children
- NC Childcare Resource & Referral Council:
  - Southwestern Child Development Commission
  - Childcare Resources, Inc.
  - The Early Years *(WAGE$, T.E.A.C.H. & Infant-Toddler Awards Program)*

QUESTIONS?

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Buncombe Partnership for Children