Investing in Early Learning: Bright Spots in North Carolina

NC Polling 2014 and 2016

Since 2014, support for early education has continued to rise among North Carolina voters across the political spectrum, according to a bipartisan poll released in 2016 by the North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation (NCECF) and the First Five Years Fund (FFYF). A strong majority of Republicans, Independents and Democrats want more investments in early learning—including providing greater access to affordable child care, Smart Start, NC Pre-K and programs that build parenting skills. More information about the 2016 poll is available at: http://buildthefoundation.org/2016/09/support-for-investing-in-early-education-rises-in-north-carolina/

Asheville Buncombe Preschool Planning Collaborative

A planning team of 25 community members convened in 2015 and is now managed by the Buncombe Partnership for Children and Children First/Communities in Schools. The collaborative is creating a collective plan to ensure that every 3- and 4-year old in Buncombe County has access to affordable, high-quality preschool. The Collaborative is currently investigating model design, workforce and financing options to draft a plan for expanding quality preschool, due to be released in September 2017. More information is available at: https://www.abppc.org/

In October 2017, the Buncombe County Commissioners approved a change to the county's economic development incentives policy to, among other things, expand access to preschool. Commissioners voted to take $250,000 from the economic development incentive fund to expand preschool. https://mountainx.com/news/commissioners-sign-off-on-economic-incentive-changes-more-preschool-space-and-opioid-lawsuit/

Bertie County

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

Dare County

Since 2004, Dare County has provided more than $2.4 million to Children & Youth Partnership for Dare County, Inc. for Smart Start services for health, early literacy, family support and child care resource and referral. The funds are provided from local property tax revenue and are included in the local budget for the county's Department of Health and Human Services.

Durham's Community Early Education/Preschool Task Force

In 2015, Durham's School Board, County Commissioners and City Council passed resolutions in support of universal, high-quality preschool for Durham's children. The Durham's Community

Early Education/Preschool Task Force was convened in 2016 to develop a plan to serve all 3- and 4-year-olds in Durham County in high-quality preschool by 2023. The plan aims to first serve 4-year-olds, prioritizing children in low-income families, by August 2019. As a starting point, the city of Durham has committed some sales tax funds for early childhood education in its 2016-2017 budget. The city is providing an additional $508,140 to support Pre-K in Durham Public Schools.

More information is available at: http://www.dconc.gov/government/departments-a-e/board-of-commissioners/state-of-durham-county-s-young-children

Forsyth County Universal Pre-K Steering Committee

In June 2014 a group of community leaders formed the Forsyth County Universal Pre-K Steering Committee to explore how to improve the quality and expand the capacity of center-based, early childhood settings for four-year-olds as well as discuss factors to be considered in creating a quality universal Pre-K system. Work groups target three critical areas: quality, funding and advocacy. In 2015 and 2016, the Steering Committee established standards for a high-quality system, studied the options for local funding of the system, and published a position paper. Work groups will create a final plan by the end of 2017, to be followed by a campaign to secure local funding by November 2018 for a major expansion of Pre-K. As a start, $3 million of a $350 million approved county bond in 2016 will be used to add six Pre-K classrooms and expand service to more than 100 children in the Winston-Salem County Forsyth Schools.

More information is available at: http://imprintscares.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Universal-PreK-for-Forsyth-County-Position-Paper.pdf

Mecklenburg County Early Education Initiatives

Since 1996, Mecklenburg County has invested in Bright Beginnings, a pre-kindergarten program for four-year-olds administered through the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools at elementary schools across the county. The program currently serves 3,100 students in 236 classrooms in 52 elementary schools. NC Pre-K also operates in the county with 56 classrooms located in 23 community-based high quality child care centers.

In 2016, the County announced a study to develop a process to expand access to early childhood education to significantly more children. The initiative, kicked off in December 2016 through a $500,000 grant from the Charlotte Executive Leadership Council, includes an initial feasibility study that was completed in October 2017, and will be followed by an implementation design study. More information is available at: http://www.cms.k12.nc.us/cmsdepartments/ci/pre-kservices/Pages/default.aspx and https://www.mecknc.gov/news/Pages/Mecklenburg-County-Launches-Study-to-Expand-.aspx

In addition to the two-part study, the County received a federal Department of Education grant in December 2016 to look at Pay for Success as a funding mechanism. The $335,667 grant for the feasibility study is for two-years.

Transylvania County Early Childhood Initiative

In 2015, Transylvania County government formed an Early Childhood Initiative to focus attention on early childhood development and school preparedness. The Initiative then published a "State of the Young Child" report based on seven months of research. The report showed that 77 percent of Transylvania County children performed below kindergarten readiness standards.

That report spurred action by the county and multiple social service providers and organizations, yielding a 12 percent improvement in kindergarten readiness.

In 2017, the Community Foundation of Western North Carolina awarded the Smartly United Early Childhood Collective (Smart Start and United Way of Transylvania County) a $100,000 grant over two years to begin to implement its plan to provide greater accessibility, quality and affordability of early education to improve preschool readiness. More information is available at: http://www.unitedwaytransylvania.org/state-young-child-transylvania-county-report-released-12142015

Wake County

In 2015, the Wake County Commissioners voted to invest in expanding NC Pre-K in their county. The 2015 county budget provided $325,728 to serve an additional 144 young children. By 2017, the county budget for NC Pre-K increased to $488,600, now serving a total of 359 additional children. The 2017 budget provides an additional $100,000 dollar-to-dollar match to encourage community investment. More information is available at: http://financingtools.buildthefoundation.org/project/wakecounty/

Resources

North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation *Local Funding for Early Learning: A Community Toolkit*	http://financingtools.buildthefoundation.org/
NC Budget and Tax Center *Results of 2016 Ballot Initiatives in North Carolina*	https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B1NAbOK_eLwHNm51ZENhWl93SWM/view?usp=sharing
First 2000 Days	http://www.first2000days.org/
North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation *Investing Today in North Carolina's Workforce of Tomorrow, 2017*	https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B1NAbOK_eLwHX0FHMFN6d0hqTG8/view
Governing: The States and Localities "The New Strategy for Raising Money for Kids," December 2016	www.governing.com/topics/health-human-services/gov-ballot-dedicated-tax-childrens-fund.html
Forum for Youth Investment	http://forumfyi.org/childrens-funding-project
Funding the Next Generation	http://www.fundingthenextgeneration.org/