



# **BUILDING CAPACITY** in Buncombe County to **Expand NC Pre-K** **Availability & Accessibility**



Buncombe  
Partnership  
for Children

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a partner in the  
Smart Start network



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- **Buncombe Partnership for Children (BPFC) planning team members** for their time, passion, and commitment to young children and their families



# Executive Summary



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

Image 1: Pre-K Expansion Components

## 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







# Introduction

According to national data collected by the Council for Community and Economic Research in 2020, the Asheville area is now NC's most expensive place to live (at 106% of the national average), but local wages are significantly lower than other NC cities, at just 84% of the national average.<sup>1</sup> Asheville has become a place where the low- and middle-wage workers that fuel our economy cannot afford to pay rent, much less pay quality private child care tuition of \$700-\$1,200 per month.

Expanding quality, accessible early childhood education (ECE) is a multi-generation investment. It provides Buncombe's youngest residents with age-appropriate enrichment that boosts healthy child development and school readiness; it allows parents to advance their employment, education and training; and it reduces future involvement in special education, criminal justice, and social services for preschool graduates. Nobel prize-winning economist [James J. Heckman](#) concludes that society reaps a 7-10% per year return on investment (ROI) for quality preschool investments, and a 13% per year ROI for comprehensive birth-to-five program investments.<sup>2</sup>

A 2021 study reviewing the long-term impacts of [Boston's Universal Pre-K lottery in the 1990's](#) confirms earlier, smaller studies' findings that even one year of quality pre-k has life-long impacts—including increased high school graduation rates and higher college entrance and completion rates.<sup>3</sup> The earlier and much cited [Perry Preschool Project](#), after 40 years of follow-up of its two-year preschool program, found significant increases in high school and college graduation, adult health, home ownership and overall earnings, and significant decreases in teen pregnancy and justice involvement.<sup>4</sup> A [Duke University study published in 2016](#) concluded that NC's investment in NC Pre-K and Smart Start has resulted in higher test scores, reduced grade retention, and fewer special education placements in participants through fifth grade.<sup>5</sup>

One benefit particularly important to Buncombe County is preschool's potential to reduce the opportunity gap in K-12 student performance. ACS has the largest disparities between Black and white students in the entire state in recent years, with white students in elementary and middle schools scoring roughly 60 percentage points higher than their Black classmates in reading and math assessments in 2018-19. BCS's racial gap on the same assessments was smaller but still unacceptable, with white students averaging roughly 30 percentage points higher than Black students. Multiple studies have concluded that children from under-resourced families and families whose first language is not English show the greatest gains from preschool participation, and gains are typically consistent across races, making pre-k a strong tool for communities focused on increasing equity.<sup>6</sup>

The potential for public preschool to promote school readiness and support local economies is widely recognized in NC with counties such as Durham, Forsyth, Mecklenburg, and Wake making significant local investments to expand preschool slots and increase quality of existing and new programs.

## Background & Summary of Planning Activities

Though the work to develop this report lasted only from July to December of 2021, the seeds were planted years before by Asheville Buncombe Preschool Planning Collaborative (ABPPC), which first convened in 2015. In 2017, [ABPPC published a report](#) outlining a Buncombe-specific preschool expansion model based on NC Pre-K but addressing key workforce and access challenges.<sup>7</sup> Though that specific model has not been implemented, local investments in early education have grown since the report was published, most notably with the 2018 establishment of the Buncombe County Early Childhood Education and Development Fund (ECEDF). This fund dedicated a recurring \$3.6 million (plus 2% annual increase) toward supports for children 0-5 years old and has allowed a variety of ECE programs to expand essential services to Buncombe families.

In January 2021, Buncombe County Commissioners announced a commitment to expanding preschool, with the goals of increasing kindergarten readiness and reducing racial disparities. An ECEDF sub-committee was formed to explore strategies and learn from the four other counties in NC who have large locally funded preschool initiatives. In June 2021, this sub-committee presented to the County Commissioners, recommending that local preschool expansion efforts focus on state-funded NC Pre-K to leverage state funding and increase the reach of this nationally recognized, high-quality pre-k model.

In July 2021, the County contracted with BPFC, as the local administrator of NC Pre-K and the backbone organization of ABPPC, to develop more detailed recommendations specific to building local providers' capacity to offer NC Pre-K and addressing families' barriers to accessing NC Pre-K. To fulfill this contract and develop recommendations, BPFC

engaged in the following activities:

- Convened three ABPPC workgroups (Compensation, Data, Program & Workforce), expanding participation to additional directors and teachers as well as other ECE professionals.
- Contracted with Child Care Services Association (CCSA) in Durham for support. They are state leaders in ECE workforce issues and data; they developed and administer Durham Pre-K; and they have worked with Wake, Mecklenburg, and Forsyth on pre-k expansion initiatives.
- Adopted [Multnomah County's 4P's Equity and Empowerment Lens](#) to apply to all planning activities, to ensure the voices of people most affected by the recommendations are included, help identify potential unintended consequences, and analyze power dynamics throughout the process.
- Organized six "community conversations" with families of children currently in NC Pre-K or potentially eligible for NC Pre-K about preschool expansion.
- Collected and compiled a variety of data and research:
  - Current local NC Pre-K teacher salaries and benefits
  - Current local NC Pre-K providers' real costs of care
  - Results from a May 2021 "Systems Survey" of all Buncombe ECE programs
  - GIS maps of current preschool locations, publicly funded slots, wrap-around, and transportation availability
  - National and state reports on NC Pre-K quality, implementation and costs
  - State and local impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on ECE enrollments, staffing, and financial stability
- Reviewed recommendations and initiatives at the national, state and regional level, including a 2019 report from the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) titled, [Barriers to Expansion of NC Pre-K: Problems and Potential Solutions](#); WestEd's report as part of the Leandro case, [Sound Basic Education for All: An Action Plan for NC](#); and Land of Sky Regional Council's My Future 2030 NC Pre-K Expansion Recommendations (unpublished).
- Held three planning retreats with ABPPC's Coordinating Team (including the co-chairs of all work groups) to review data and finalize local recommendations for NC Pre-K expansion.
- Presented preliminary recommendations to ABPPC, the ECEDF Committee, and the NC Pre-K Advisory Committee.
- Shared the draft report with ABPPC members and NC Pre-K Advisory Committee members for feedback.

The information and recommendations presented here are the result of years of collaborative effort, and, if implemented, they will have a significant, positive impact on the providers of, and families eligible for, NC Pre-K. However, NC Pre-K's reach is limited to 4-year-olds whose families live close to the federal poverty limit. Research is clear that two consecutive years of preschool have an even greater impact on children's development than one. We also know that many local families who are not income-eligible for NC Pre-K cannot afford to pay full price for private preschool.

Research is also clear about the positive impact of high-quality care and learning experiences during the most critical period of development from infancy through age three. Yet, Buncombe County is considered a "child care desert" for these ages (as is much of the state). ABPPC's long-term vision is for all children to have access to high-quality, affordable early care and education. Thus, we submit this report in the hopes that expanding NC Pre-K is not the final goal, but an important step toward eventual universal preschool access for all 3- and 4- year-olds and continued support for expanding care for infants and toddlers.

## Data-Driven Results Expected from NC Pre-K Expansion

Buncombe County laid out three overarching desired results for investing local funding into NC Pre-K, and those results remained central in this planning work. Below, each is listed, along with possible ways progress can be measured. Buncombe County's Strategy and Innovation Department is currently working with both local school systems on developing data agreements, common metrics and data-collection procedures.

### 1. Expand access to the NC Pre-K program

- Primary indicator: Percent of income-eligible 4-year-olds enrolled in NC Pre-K
  - Baseline: 35%



- Target: 75% (as identified by the NC Early Childhood Action Plan and My Future NC 2030)
  - Notes: This is a community-wide population measure.
- Secondary indicators: Further assessment of % enrolled by race, ethnicity, and disability status; # of NC Pre-K sites, classrooms, and slots; location of slots in relation to higher concentrations of eligible families

## 2. Increase Kindergarten readiness

- Primary indicator: Percent of kindergarteners participating in NC Pre-K program who score proficient on NC Early Learning Inventory fall administration (the new state-wide Kindergarten formative assessment from DPI) compared with children who did not attend preschool.
  - Baseline: Not established yet (Buncombe County data team is working closely with both school systems to develop this.)
  - Target: Not established yet
  - Note: It will take a significant level of NC Pre-K expansion before a difference can be seen at the community population level.
- Secondary indicators: % proficient on the Brigance Screens III, % kindergarteners suspended or expelled, % kindergarteners retained

## 3. Close racial and ethnic achievement gaps

- Primary indicator: Percent of kindergarteners participating in NC Pre-K program who score proficient on NC ELI fall administration by race/ethnicity/language/income compared with children who did not attend preschool.
  - Baseline: not established yet
  - Target: not established yet
  - Note: It will take a significant increase in NC Pre-K enrollment to impact the community population-level data
- Secondary indicators: K-3 literacy assessment & 3<sup>rd</sup> grade End of Grade exam results by race/income/language/pre-k experience; suspension and expulsion data by race/income/language/pre-k experience

# NC's State-Funded Preschool

In 2001, NC piloted a free, high-quality preschool program called More at Four for children 4 years of age whose families were income eligible. Buncombe County was one of the first counties to participate in the program with 25 funded slots. The program design was based on a typical school day/school year of 6.5 hours of education daily for a 10-month period. It also provided classroom start-up funds and allowed programs three to six years to build toward meeting all program requirements. In 2010, the NC General Assembly moved oversight of the preschool program from the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to the NC Health and Human Services' Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) and renamed it NC Pre-Kindergarten (NC Pre-K).

Today, state-funded preschool is available throughout NC with over 29,000 funded slots. NC Pre-K serves children who turn 4 by August 31<sup>st</sup> of the school year and whose family income falls at or below 75% of the State Median Income (SMI). For a family of four, the current income cap is \$60,554. When family income exceeds the income cap, children can be enrolled when additional risk factors impacting the child's development are identified, such as a chronic health condition, a developmental need or delay, or limited English proficiency.

NC Pre-K has been recognized nationally as a high-quality program held to significantly higher standards than the 5-star rating in the NC Quality Rating System.<sup>8,9</sup> For example, lead teachers must be working toward or hold a bachelor's degree and Birth-to-Kindergarten (B-K) Licensure. The program must maintain a lower teacher-child ratio, utilize an approved preschool curriculum, conduct ongoing formative assessments, and carry out developmental screenings for each child. Licensed teachers also participate in annual outside evaluations to maintain their teaching license.

Each county has a local NC Pre-K administrator that is either a Smart Start Local Partnership, a local school district, or a Head Start agency. In Buncombe County, Buncombe Partnership for Children is the administrator, in partnership with a 13-person Advisory Committee.

# Buncombe County Preschool Landscape

Preschool in Buncombe County is offered in a variety of settings, including public elementary schools, community centers, private centers (this includes both for-profit and non-profit centers), religious organizations, and licensed Family Child Care Homes.

Some families are eligible for publicly funded preschool slots in one of the following programs:

**Table 1: Publicly funded preschool programs in Buncombe County**

	NC Pre-K	Head Start	Developmental Day	Child Care Subsidy
<b>Ages served</b>	4 years old	3 & 4 years old	3 & 4 years old	0-12 years old
<b>Locations offered</b>	Private centers, ACS sites, Head Start sites (29)	Head Start sites (18)	Private centers (3) & ACS (1 classroom)	Private centers (47+)
<b>Program day</b>	6.5 hours	6.5 hours	6.5 hours	8+ hours
<b>Program year</b>	10 months	10 months	10 months plus summer care offered for a fee	12 months
<b>Income eligibility</b>	75% of State Median Income	100% of Federal Poverty Limit	N/A	200% of Federal Poverty Limit
<b>Other eligibility</b>	Child with an identified risk factor if over income	Priority ratings for certain child and family needs/ challenges	Certain developmental diagnoses; active IEP	All adults must work or attend school at least 30 hours/week
<b>Funding</b>	Federal & State	Federal	Federal & State	Federal & State
<b>Local Admin</b>	Buncombe Partnership for Children	Community Action Opportunities	Asheville City and Buncombe County Schools	Buncombe County Health & Human Services

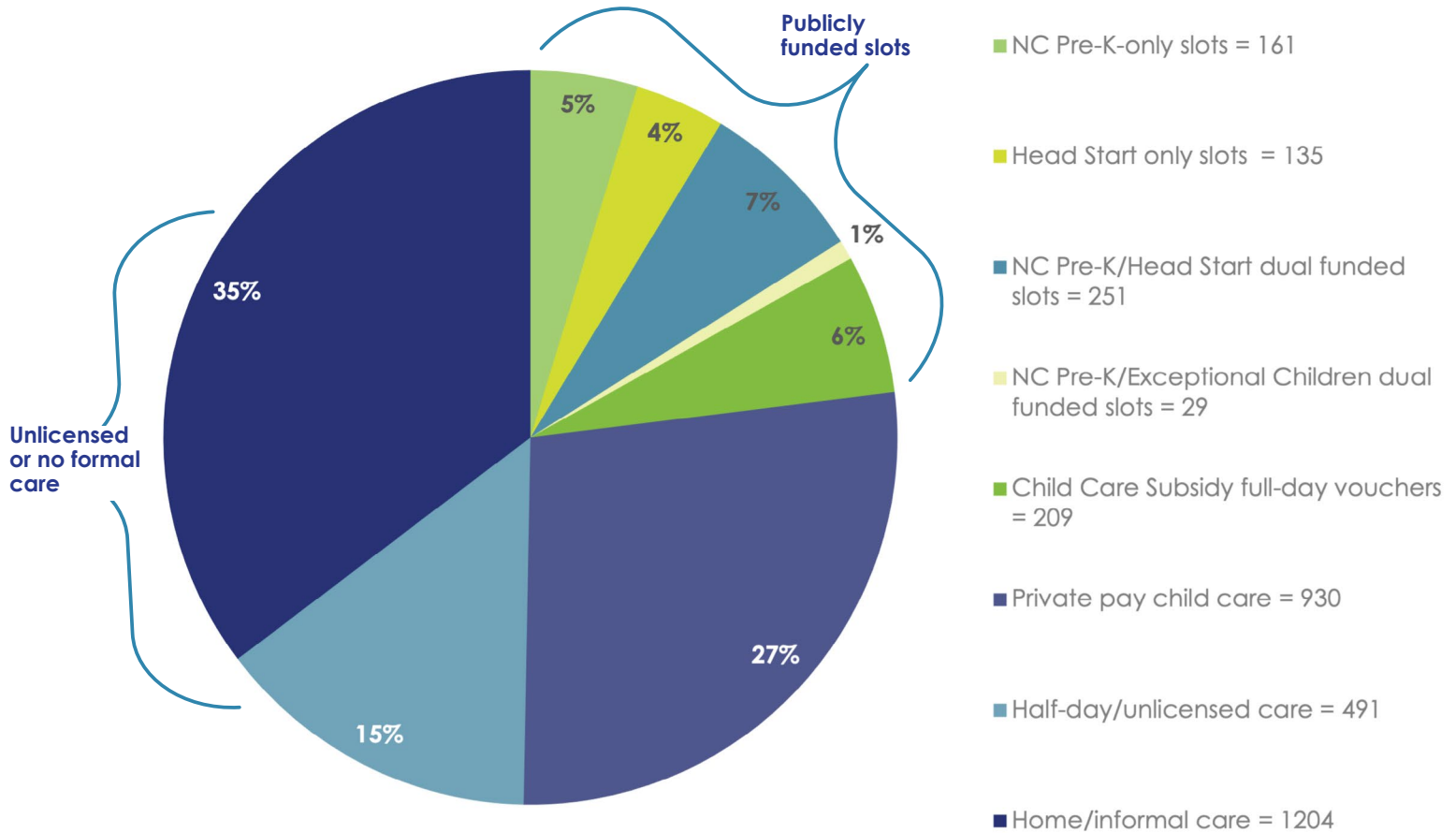
The chart below helps us understand the overall 4-year-old preschool landscape. Buncombe County has a total of 3,410 4-year-olds and 5-year-olds not yet in kindergarten. Half of these children attend either a half-day/unlicensed center or are in the care of relatives, neighbors, and other informal settings; 23% are in full-day, publicly funded programs, while 27% pay private tuition.<sup>10,11</sup>





Image 2: Pre-K landscape

## Buncombe 4- and Pre-K 5-year-olds Preschool Landscape



*\*Exact number of slots receiving dual funding changes from year to year; Half-day program data last updated in 2016*

Of the 1700 children who attend some kind of licensed care, roughly 70% are enrolled in high-quality programs (defined as 4- and 5-star rated facilities), and 30% are served in 1- to 3-star and religious-sponsored licensed facilities.<sup>12</sup>

According to recent work by the Land of Sky's My Future NC 2030 Pre-K Workgroup, there are 1,183 children in Buncombe County who are income eligible for NC Pre-K, yet just 35% of those eligible are currently being enrolled in the program. An additional 769 children are eligible and would benefit from the NC Pre-K experience. One of My Future NC 2030 goals is for 75% of eligible children to be enrolled in the NC Pre-K program. **To reach 75% enrollment, Buncombe County would need to serve 473 additional children annually, requiring a minimum of 26 new NC Pre-K classrooms.**<sup>13</sup>



Buncombe County is currently under contract to serve a minimum of 435 NC Pre-K children. In 2021-22, allocation of direct service funding resulted in a total of 441 funded slots in the following NC Pre-K settings:

**Table 2: NC Pre-K slots, locations, funding**

2021-22 NC Pre-K Direct Service Funding: \$2,295,220 for service to minimum of 435 children				
Providers	Funded Slots	Allocation	Licensed Sites	Total Classrooms
Asheville City Schools*	73	\$386,900	5	9
Childcare Network #177	15	\$109,200	1	1
Christine Avery Early Learning	16	\$116,480	1	1
CAO/Head Start*	215.5	\$794,480	18	27
Eliada Child Development	80	\$582,400	1	6
Irene Wortham Center	11	\$80,080	1	2
Verner Center for Early Learning	13	\$94,640	1	1
YWCA Early Learning Program	18	\$131,040	1	1
Totals	441.5	\$2,295,220	29	48

\*Highlighted rows indicate slots that are “dual funded,” receiving not only NC Pre-K funds but also public school or federal Head Start funding to help cover the provider’s cost per child.

Because NC Pre-K slots at Asheville City Schools (ACS) and Community Action Opportunities (CAO)/Head Start sites are dually funded, their NC Pre-K reimbursement rates are lower. In 2013, DCDEE established a differentiated rate structure taking into consideration the various federal and state funding streams available to different types of providers. In FY2018, Buncombe’s NC Pre-K Advisory Committee successfully advocated for a 12% rate increase for Buncombe County private providers and public school partners, though the increase still doesn’t come close to covering the true cost of care. The current reimbursement rates by provider type are (See **Appendix B** for more details):

**Table 3: NC Pre-K differentiated rates**

NC Pre-K Reimbursement Rates	
Provider Type	Current Annual Rates in Buncombe (for a 10-month school year)
Private Centers	\$7,280
Asheville City Schools	\$5,300
CAO/Head Start (applies to slots added since 2016)	\$4,000
CAO/Head Start (applies to slots funded before 2016 rate increase)	\$3,440





# Opportunities to Expand NC Pre-K

Expanding NC Pre-K requires strengthening the mixed delivery model of private licensed child care and public school settings (See **Appendix C** for map of current funded slots). Several current NC Pre-K private providers have the space to expand and open new classrooms if qualified staff could be secured. However, capacity is limited, making recruitment of new private providers to NC Pre-K a critical activity to serve more children.

Historically, public school preschool classrooms have served the greatest number of NC Pre-K children across the state: approximately 50% of all NC Pre-K slots were in public school programs in 2018-19.<sup>14</sup> Throughout NC, 78 (of 115) school districts use Title 1 funds to support preschool programs, but locally, neither Asheville City Schools (ACS) nor Buncombe County Schools (BCS) offer a Title 1 Preschool program. ACS, which does offer a private-pay/blended funding preschool program, is a long-standing NC Pre-K provider in our community.

Buncombe County Schools' preschool offerings are limited to four Career-Technical Education (CTE) classrooms and one half-day Exceptional Children's classroom. The district does, however, make classroom space available to CAO/Head Start at all but six county elementary schools. If BCS were to offer Title 1 Preschool in the future, it would have a huge impact on Buncombe County's preschool landscape, especially in more rural parts of the county where no private preschool programs exist.

Because our largest school system does not offer a preschool program to partner with, and Head Start already dually enrolls close to half of the NC Pre-K slots, private centers are the most viable option for significant expansion. Two years ago, BPFC identified several centers as close to "NC Pre-K ready." However, the COVID pandemic has brought financial instability and debilitating staff shortages, impacting the capacity of many programs. Hopefully, the combination of State and Federal COVID-19 funding and robust recruitment and retention programs, like BPFC's Workforce Development Program, will be able to turn the trend around in coming years.

## Barriers to Expanding NC Pre-K

Even though NC Pre-K is nationally recognized as a high-quality program, there are challenges to expanding it locally. The challenges below were all significantly straining the system before the pandemic, and they have been exacerbated by COVID-19 and the current "Great Resignation."

### Inadequate per-child reimbursement rate

In February 2017, DCDEE, in consultation with the Department of Public Instruction (DPI), submitted **a report on the cost and effectiveness of NC Pre-K**. This report concluded that state reimbursements for NC Pre-K slots cover approximately 61% of the actual average cost of care, (which they calculated as \$9120/child/year).<sup>15</sup> The state reimbursement rate has also not increased since 2012 (while expenses have soared). Head Start and public school district providers, who receive lower, differentiated reimbursements (see Table 3 above), typically add the NC Pre-K reimbursement to other funds for a given slot (called dual enrollment, or blended funding), but private child care programs rarely have other funding streams to make up that difference. Nor do they have other funding sources for HR/finance/administrative staff and facility costs. This creates significant inequities among NC Pre-K sites. It also disincentivizes private providers from offering the program, even though, in Buncombe County, private sites are the best avenue for NC Pre-K expansion at this point. Adding to this disincentive is the fact that the reimbursement for a child care subsidy voucher in Buncombe (which requires a 4 or 5-star rating, but no extra licensure, assessment tools, etc.) is now higher than an NC Pre-K slot (\$775/month vs. \$728/month) and provides 12 months of revenue rather than 10.

### Lack of pay parity with K-12 and inconsistent wages across NC Pre-K settings

NC Pre-K teachers are required to hold a Birth to Kindergarten (B-K) license, which is the same teacher license that a public school Kindergarten teacher holds. However, lead teachers with B-K licensure are often paid significantly less than their public school counterparts, resulting in high turnover in NC Pre-K classrooms. Locally, NC Pre-K teacher turnover reached 64% in 2018-19 (pre-pandemic). In 2018, according to the last Buncombe comprehensive workforce report, Head Start teachers were paid on average 64% of public school teachers, and teachers at private



centers were paid on average 52% of public school salaries.<sup>16</sup> It is important to note that in 2021 Community Action Opportunities increased their Head Start licensed teachers' salaries to pay on parity with public school teachers. Most private centers, too, have utilized recent pandemic-related stabilization grants to increase wages, though not close to reaching K-12 parity.

Along with the serious disruption to students, mid-year lead teacher turnover has a large financial impact on providers. NC Pre-K classrooms who lose a licensed teacher mid-year and must place an unlicensed substitute receive a lower state reimbursement rate, creating large gaps in the centers' budgets. Current providers have cited this financial risk as a major deterrent to committing to additional NC Pre-K classrooms.

## No ramp-up supports for programs to meet NC Pre-K standards

Currently, there is no financial or logistical support for a new program or classroom to ramp up to meet the additional NC Pre-K program requirements. Converting an existing classroom to NC Pre-K costs roughly \$15,000 to purchase and be trained in the curriculum, formative assessment tool, and developmental screening tool, plus procuring enhanced furnishings and classroom materials. Opening a brand-new NC Pre-K classroom that meets requirements costs \$20,000-25,000. This lack of initial support means new NC Pre-K providers end up learning the program (implementing new curricula and assessments, developing program policies, etc.) as they deliver it. This not only jeopardizes program quality and fidelity, but also the center's licensure status. Because NC Pre-K standards are written into DCDEE's licensing rules, centers risk citations that impact their license during their annual DCDEE licensing visit.

## Insufficient administrative funding (set rate of 4% of direct service allocation)

In Buncombe County, NC Pre-K currently funds 441 children across 29 sites and 48 classrooms (see **Table 2** above). The administrative budget is set at only 4% of the direct service allocation. Thus, the current base administrative budget is \$94,536. An additional non-recurring 2% has been allocated in FY2022 for a total administrative budget of \$139,619. This amount covers a small portion of the BPFC Executive Director's time as the Contract Administrator, 100% of the NC Pre-K Program Director position, a small percentage of a newly created NC Pre-K Program Coach's time, an annual summer preservice training and a limited number of core professional development opportunities for NC Pre-K teachers.

It does not fund any ongoing classroom quality supports, such as coaching for NC Pre-K teachers and administrators. Nor can it provide the additional child social, emotional, behavioral health supports that so many NC Pre-K teachers have said are desperately needed. Because NC Pre-K classrooms prioritize enrollment for children with higher support needs, behavioral health issues are often concentrated, requiring extra services to support developmentally appropriate practices. Extra social, emotional, behavioral supports for teachers may also increase equitable child outcomes, since national data shows black children are harshly punished (secluded, restrained, suspended, and pushed out) at far greater rates than white children.<sup>17</sup>

In FY2019 and FY2020, BPFC used non-recurring NC Pre-K funds to partner with the SUNSHINE Project (a program of FIRST, which provides teacher and family supports related to children with developmental delays or challenging behaviors) to work with the eight NC Pre-K classrooms in private settings at the time. This pilot was in response to NC Pre-K teachers across the county requesting more behavioral health-focused supports for the benefit of the children enrolled in the program. It ended due to the challenges of planning for long term supports with non-recurring funding, though the need continues.

## Fractured, complicated systems

One consistent theme arising from family focus groups is the difficulty families have finding publicly funded programs, figuring out which programs they might be eligible for, and moving through the extensive application processes (see **Table 1** above). If children are in a dually funded slot, they may have to complete two or three applications, each with different timelines, follow-up, and required documentation. Compounding this confusion is that resources for family outreach are scarce. Head Start is not allowed to use funds for marketing, and NC Pre-K's 4% administrative budget leaves little for outreach.

## The school day/school year model

NC Pre-K was modeled after the public school calendar, but a 6.5-hour/day, 10-month year often does not meet the needs of working families or caregivers seeking employment. All six private NC Pre-K providers offer full-day options and/or additional summer programming called “wrap-around care,” since their other classrooms run on a full day/year schedule. (Note that several programs have reduced this service due to COVID-19 restrictions, since extending beginning and end-of-day care typically requires combining children from multiple classrooms. Significant additional funding and staffing are required to avoid this.)

Because wrap-around care is not part of the state’s NC Pre-K model, families are responsible for shouldering the cost. Families who qualify access child care subsidy vouchers to help with this expense. However, some families who qualify for NC Pre-K do not also qualify for a voucher because of eligibility barriers such as parent work or school requirements.

Paying for wrap-around care is only part of the challenge. Nineteen out of twenty-nine NC Pre-K sites in Buncombe County are located in public schools (either ACS or Head Start classrooms in BCS). Since these buildings aren’t staffed beyond the school day, children served in these sites need other arrangements. ACS sites have recently arranged to serve children until 4:30 (for a fee).

## Lack of transportation

Most preschool programs require families to transport children to and from the center each day. For families with no vehicle, unreliable transportation, or work schedules that aren’t congruent with school hours, this is a significant barrier, though it is difficult to quantify how many families choose not to apply to NC Pre-K because of transportation challenges. Unfortunately, offering transportation to 4-year-olds is complicated because regulations require an extra adult on the vehicle, safety restraints for each child, and children can spend no more than one hour on the vehicle. Few private preschool programs can consider the burden of managing a vehicle<sup>18</sup>, hiring and training drivers and monitors, and ensuring child safety on the road. The staffing and one-hour route limit mean even well resourced, larger programs struggle to offer the service in more than a handful of concentrated communities. While Asheville and parts of Buncombe County have access to public transportation through the city’s bus system and Mountain Mobility, child care directors have repeatedly said public transportation works for a very limited number of families. The rural nature of Buncombe County provides the challenge of longer routes and higher costs, but greater potential for expanding access.

## Income eligibility limit

Both Head Start and NC Pre-K administrators have noted that, in recent years, more and more families who are over the income eligibility limits are applying. As Asheville’s housing market and cost of living spikes, families who make more than the program’s limit of 75% of the state median income are desperate for help in paying preschool tuition. ABPPC’s 2017 family survey asked, “If you wanted to have your child in preschool, but did not send them, please share why.” Of 350 respondents to that question, almost 71.5% answered “too expensive.” This is why Mecklenburg and Durham counties developed parallel local pre-k programs free to families up to 400% of the federal poverty limit.









# Six Key Strategies

for NC Pre-K Expansion

Planning for expansion of the NC Pre-K program in Buncombe County means addressing the barriers Buncombe County providers and families experience. The following six recommended strategies focus on stabilizing current NC Pre-K providers, expanding the pool of high-quality providers and licensed teachers, and making it easier for families to take advantage of NC Pre-K's proven benefits.

At the request of Buncombe County staff, BPFC took an “a la carte approach” to planning and presenting recommendations. This approach allows for maximum flexibility as Buncombe County goes through its budget processes. Each recommended solution below is discussed and costed out separately, with suggested roll-out timelines that could be adjusted as funds become available (though some strategies do need to be in place before others, as noted in the “Implementation Considerations” sections). The graphic below lays out the six broad solutions this planning process encompassed: the top three address barriers that ECE providers face in offering the NC Pre-K program, and the lower three address families’ barriers to enrolling their children in the program.

Image 3: Recommendations Snapshot

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

Barriers to PROVIDING

**Fully funded Pre-K**

- Supplements slots by 36%
- Pay licensed teachers on parity with K-12
- Ensure quality supports

**ECE Education & Career Pipeline**

- Ed Advancement Coach
- A-B Tech tutoring
- Logistical/retention supports

**Ramp up to NC Pre-K Program**

- Admin & teacher coaching
- NC Pre-K tools and PD
- Logistical/retention supports

Barriers to ACCESSING

**Coordinated Outreach & Enrollment**

- Online application portal
- Outreach & navigation
- Coordinated placement

**Expanded access to wrap-around care**

- Pilot innovations
- Demand & feasibility study

**Expanded access to transportation**

- Pilot innovations
- Demand & feasibility study

# STRATEGY ONE:

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

A fully funded NC Pre-K program means that the funding a provider receives fully covers the expenses of offering the program: retaining licensed lead teachers, meeting high-quality instructional standards, and fulfilling significant additional administrative demands. It also means that there is equity across NC Pre-K provider types, in relation to teacher compensation/supports and quality supports. This is especially important in Buncombe County, since BCS does not offer preschool, and half of Buncombe's NC Pre-K slots are already dually funded with Head Start; the only significant NC Pre-K growth we can expect soon is in our private centers. NC Pre-K must be financially and logistically viable for private providers who do not have additional federal and state funds to supplement slots or to hire additional administrative and curriculum support staff.

**Recommendation 1:** Use local funds to subsidize the state's inadequate per-child reimbursement rate.

- Increase private centers' annual per-child rate from \$7280 to \$9900, which more adequately covers the cost of a lead teacher paid at K-12 parity (with 0-1 years of experience on their teaching license), an assistant teacher paid a local living wage, and a percentage of floaters, substitutes, cooks, and other support staff, as well as administrative costs, program materials and consumables. It is also in line with the 2018 legislative study's identified state average cost of NC Pre-K care at \$9120, adjusted for 2021, and Buncombe's elevated cost of living.
- For blended slots at ACS and Head Start sites, increase the NC Pre-K differentiated reimbursement rates by an equivalent percentage (See **Appendix D** for details).

**Cost:** \$825,000 based on current state-allocated slots; per-slot rate will need to be adjusted annually as living wage and/or public school salaries increase.

**Recommendation 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.

- Implement an NC Pre-K pay scale based on a combination of the ACS and BCS pay scales (see **Appendix E** for recommended pay scale details).
- Provide additional payments to private NC Pre-K providers to make it possible for them to compensate teachers for total years of experience on their licenses (see **Appendix F** for salary supplement calculation details). Public schools have always paid preschool teachers on their K-12 salary scale, and as of 2021, Head Start has achieved pay parity with K-12.
- Pay parity will create equity across NC Pre-K settings, reducing competition for teachers among NC Pre-K programs and with the public school systems, reducing turnover and thus improving quality.

**Cost:** \$49,200 based on current year teachers' licenses. Costs will change based on number of slots in private centers, employed teachers' experience on licenses, and local public school pay scale adjustments.

**Recommendation 3:** Require assistant teachers in all settings be paid a minimum of the local living wage.

- Local living wage is defined by Just Economics' annual calculation (currently \$15.80 with employee-provided health insurance; \$17.30 if no insurance).
- According to the 2018 Workforce Report, \$13.00 was the highest wage for any assistant teachers in Buncombe County, so this living wage is a significant increase.

**Cost:** \$0 as this wage is built into the per-slot reimbursement increase (which should increase as living wage increases).



**Recommendation 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.

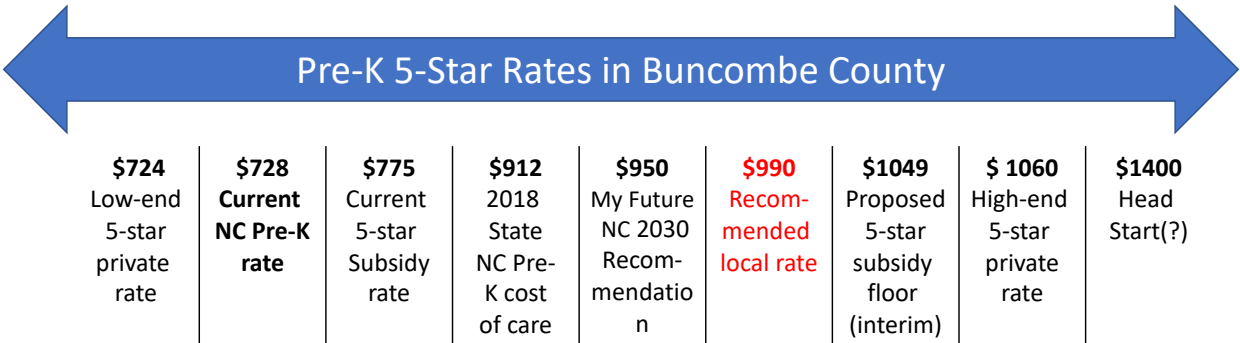
- One NC Pre-K Program Coach can work with a case load of 12-15 NC Pre-K classrooms in private centers.
- Private centers rarely have their own instructional coaches (like the much larger public school and Head Start programs do), and they tend to attract teachers newer to the field who need that support, so this is necessary to ensure equitable NC Pre-K quality across sites.

**Cost:** \$0-\$72,500 annually, depending on NC Pre-K administrative allocation and the availability of occasional federal funds allocated to the NC Pre-K program.

### Rationale and/or research base

As extensive feedback from local providers, as well as studies by DCDEE and the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), make clear, the low reimbursement for NC Pre-K presents a significant deterrent to programs that would otherwise be interested in offering this high-quality pre-k program.<sup>19, 20</sup> BPFC reviewed local NC Pre-K providers’ actual costs for providing the program, as well as state and national cost analyses, to arrive at the recommended annual reimbursement rate of \$9,900/slot. This amount is lower than Wake County’s NC Pre-K supplemented rate (\$10,990) or Durham Pre-K’s rate (\$12,500), and very much in line with other Buncombe reimbursement rates and private pay tuition:

Image 4: Spectrum of local Pre-K rates




The largest single cost, and greatest asset, of any ECE program is its teachers. With early pandemic emergency funds, researchers at the University of Virginia were able to conduct the first true experiment to measure the impact of financial incentives on ECE teacher retention. In a large VA county, child care sites were randomized into either receiving 3 bonus payments over 9 months or no financial incentives. Over all sites, turnover during those 9 months was 25% in the control group, and 14% in the incentivized group. Looking just at private centers (which have the lowest wages), turnover was cut in half (30% in control group; 15% in incentivized group).<sup>21</sup> This provides evidence that financial incentives can work, even in the pandemic, and they have the largest impact on the lowest paid employees.

A fully funded NC Pre-K is not only about covering costs and paying teachers. It also must include intensive quality supports for teachers and programs. NC Pre-K teachers are, overall, well educated in child development and teaching strategies. However, they are often the only licensed teacher in their building, and they need additional support to implement the program with fidelity. One-on-one coaching is essential. In a summary of the evidence on teacher preparation, the Center for Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes concluded, “on-site coaching, when combined with professional development, contribute to improvements in the quality of teaching and gains in children’s learning, especially when it is focused on teaching practices that support growth in key domains of school readiness...”<sup>22</sup>

### Equity Implications

Some of Buncombe’s private providers located in communities who serve largely BIPOC children and/or under-resourced families have historically offered care at lower rates, accepted more child care subsidy vouchers and waived



the parent co-pay for families unable to afford it. The resulting decrease in revenue results in these programs operating with very thin financial margins, placing them at greater financial risk. These factors also make these programs less financially able to provide NC Pre-K, largely due to NC Pre-K's current low reimbursement rates. Increasing NC Pre-K reimbursement rates and providing salary supplements for teachers will strengthen these programs and their vital teaching staff, also allowing more programs to offer NC Pre-K in a wider variety of communities across Buncombe County.

## Implementation considerations

This is presented as Strategy One because it must be implemented first in order to increase stability for current NC Pre-K providers and to make the program financially and logistically feasible so that other providers will want to participate. It reduces programs' financial risk, reduces the financial and logistical burden of maintaining B-K licensed teachers, and ensures high quality NC Pre-K implementation across settings. This strategy can also be implemented with basically no lead-up time, beyond determining what organization will administer reimbursements and salary supplements.

## Unintended Consequences

Anticipating and considering potential negative consequences, we want to ensure that we are not weakening some aspects of the system as we strengthen others. The following were identified as potential consequences we must work to avoid:

- A reduction in infant/toddler slots if providers choose to shift infant/toddler slots to preschool slots to receive the increased reimbursement rate.
- A loss of subsidy slots in current NC Pre-K programs, as providers may be enticed to replace subsidy slots with NC Pre-K slots.
- Conversion of private pay slots in current NC Pre-K programs to NC Pre-K slots, which does not result in serving more children or expanding the NC Pre-K Program.

## 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.

Currently, BPFC's Workforce Development Program (WDP) is focused on recruiting new teachers into the field and supporting them to meet basic requirements and complete their first ECE college course to be a qualified substitute or assistant teacher. Our community needs a comprehensive teacher education pipeline to support working teachers (many of whom are single mothers) through the entire education journey. This strategy would make that comprehensive pipeline a reality, adding ECE-specific tutoring supports at A-B Tech to increase Associates of Arts (AA) degree attainment, and expanding BPFC's supports for teachers as they pursue higher education through a variety of online ECE bachelor's degrees and B-K licensure programs. BPFC staff will ensure that all eligible participants are enrolled in the T.E.A.C.H.™ Early Childhood Program and in the Child Care WAGES™ Program, leveraging state resources. However, local directors have stated that they cannot always support educators in utilizing T.E.A.C.H.™, since programs are required to provide release time out of the classroom for those teachers to complete coursework, which is often extremely challenging given the current teacher shortage.

**Recommendation 1:** Continue to fund BPFC's Child Care Resources (CCR) and Workforce Development Program 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.

- The Education Advancement Coach will support at least 30 participants per year, in cohorts. Cohorts will be of teachers in similar places in their educational journey.
- Teachers pursuing ECE bachelor's degrees and B-K licensure in Buncombe County do so through several programs—all online and outside of our community (Western Carolina University and UNC Greensboro are popular locally). The Education Advancement Coach will be able to support teachers no matter where they are enrolled.
- This position represents an important extension of BPFC's existing Early Childhood Workforce Development Program, which has, up to now, focused on recruiting and supporting teachers new to ECE. (See **Appendix G** for integrated WDP graphic)

**Cost:** \$69,000, recurring annually

**Recommendation 2:** Support one part-time A-B Tech-based ECE tutor to provide ECE-specific class supports.

- The Buncombe County Early Childhood Workforce Development Program experience has taught us that many teachers in the ECE field struggle in, or are intimidated by, college courses, and need one-on-one supports to successfully engage in, think critically about, and apply course content to assignments and projects.
- A tutor based at A-B Tech will be able to collaborate directly with professors and students to support individual student academic needs.
- As utilization of this ECE tutor is documented, college funding may become available to support the position.

**Cost:** \$8,300 in first year of implementation; in future years the position may partially sustain itself.

**Recommendation 3:** Ensure participants can be successful in their coursework by providing financial and logistical supports.

- Supports include funding for substitutes to ensure release time from the classroom to complete coursework, child care and food for group study sessions.
- Financial incentives for teachers upon completing specific higher education benchmarks. Incentives will be tied to individual professional development plans, goals set by teacher and coach, and successful completion of college coursework.

**Cost:** \$54,000 estimated based on 30 participants; actual expenditures will vary slightly based on number of credit hours participants are taking and level of logistical support needed.



## Rationale and/or research base

Without B-K licensed teachers, NC Pre-K expansion is impossible. Research confirms that higher education – specifically bachelor's degrees with specialized training in ECE- are associated with high classroom quality in multiple domains. Additionally, programs with strong child outcomes employ educators with bachelors' level ECE training. The Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council recommended in 2015 that lead ECE teachers have this level of education, and these are two of 10 national benchmarks for quality according to NIEER.<sup>23</sup> Investing in teachers' education is the vital first step towards investing in children.

According to the 2019 Buncombe ECE Workforce study, 68% of teaching staff had at least an associate's degree in any field of study. Only 33% of teaching staff had a degree (associate's, bachelor's, or master's) in ECE. While 50% of teaching staff had taken six or more courses in ECE, they may not have completed any degree or certificate program. Our pool of teachers with ECE degrees was small before COVID-19. As the pandemic caused many experienced teachers to leave the field, newer, less educated teachers are replacing them, to the extent that DCDEE is currently holding programs harmless for lower teacher education levels (so it doesn't impact their star rating).

This strategy is an investment in Buncombe's early childhood educators across the board. Keeping this comprehensive educational and career pipeline as a stand-alone strategy, separate from the "Ramp Up to NC Pre-K" program (see strategy three below) allows more teachers to pursue their education and advance in the field. Many of those will eventually work in NC Pre-K because of its more desirable wages. Those that do not will still be increasing the quality of the programs they work in, benefiting Buncombe's children.

## Equity Implications

In family focus groups, BIPOC families often expressed that they want their children to see teachers who look like them and share their culture. That gives them a stronger sense of safety for their children. Currently, 18% of Buncombe NC Pre-K educators identify as Black; 14% identify as Hispanic. While this representation is higher than the county population as a whole (6.3% Black and 6.8% Hispanic), it is low compared to the NC Pre-K population (33% Black and 22% Hispanic). This strategy allows more opportunities for BIPOC teachers to pursue higher education so that our NC Pre-K classrooms reflect the cultures and demographics of the children enrolled. Additionally, these supports will be embedded in BPFC's existing Workforce Development Program, which has already built trusted relationships within diverse communities to recruit and train new teachers of color.

## Implementation Considerations

These education supports must begin as soon as possible. It will take 3-6 months to staff the project, recruit teachers into the pipeline, and ensure that those teachers are able to enroll in the degree programs that best fit their needs. Teachers who are working full time, supporting a family, and making the commitment to return to higher education can sometimes only take one course at a time, so degree attainment will be slow.

In addition, with the current staffing shortages and resulting "double duty" many working teachers are carrying right now, encouraging existing teachers to add coursework to their schedules will be a challenge, even with the robust support and incentives laid out in this strategy.

## Unintended Consequences

The following were identified as potential negative consequences we want to avoid:

- Teachers who commit to furthering their education through this program in part because they are expecting higher future wages may find that without additional federal or state funding, overall wages drop following the end of American Rescue Plan funding in late 2023.
- With higher educational attainment, teachers may leave their current program to seek employment at an NC Pre-K program, disrupting programs and impacting younger children.
- Program directors may become frustrated with higher numbers of scholarship participants, which can create staff scheduling challenges, even with funded substitutes.





## 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.

This strategy provides future NC Pre-K providers time to learn about NC Pre-K standards, build classroom teacher and administrative capacity to meet those standards, and develop policies and procedures to successfully integrate NC Pre-K into center operations BEFORE they enter into an NC Pre-K contract and are held to those standards. Durham Pre-K’s experience is that most providers require at least 2 years to reach NC Pre-K standards and readiness. The Ramp Up to NC Pre-K Program would require a Memorandum of Agreement with ECE providers actively working toward NC Pre-K provision within the next 1-3 years.

**Recommendation 1:** Fund one dedicated Ramp-up Program Coach to provide weekly (for teachers) and bi-weekly (for directors) coaching sessions working toward specific NC Pre-K quality benchmarks.

- The Ramp-up Program Coach will support up to 10 individual classrooms. This caseload is flexible and includes coaching of associated staff, including program directors. For example, 10 classrooms could include lead teachers, assistant teachers, and 3-4 program directors new to NC Pre-K. Or it may include 8 classrooms and 5-6 directors, if more participating sites are preparing only one classroom for NC Pre-K.
- Ramp-up Program Coach will work with program directors to develop program goals and benchmarks to advance the program towards meeting NC Pre-K standards. These include observable markers of classroom and program quality as well as DCDEE licensing requirements.
- Ramp-up Program Coach will work with teachers in classrooms working towards NC Pre-K provision to develop and implement individual professional development plans, support them on their path towards B-K licensure and connect teachers in similar pathways to each other via monthly Communities of Practice.
- Ramp-up Program Coach’s training will include concrete skills to support educators in implementing NC Pre-K’s evidence-based tools and practices (often based on white norms) in ways that honor children’s diverse cultural backgrounds and individual strengths.

**Cost:** \$72,500 recurring annually.

**Recommendation 2:** Fund NC Pre-K core instructional tools and required professional development for ramp-up participants.

- Once a program is officially an NC Pre-K provider, the NC Pre-K Program covers the cost of required curricula and assessment tools (TS Gold, Brigance, Creative Curriculum, etc.). Providing access to, and training on, these expensive and complex resources during the ramp-up period, before programs sign an NC Pre-K contract, ensures NC Pre-K classrooms are meeting standards from Day One of official implementation. It also ensures that data from formative assessments is reliable and collected as early in the ramp-up process as possible.
- This also includes training for directors in CLASS, an evidence-based classroom assessment model used across the US to objectively measure teacher interactions and the quality of instruction. This training will ensure directors’ ability to provide meaningful instructional leadership. The CLASS tool will also be part of teachers’ professional development and individual coaching sessions. Director training in the model will allow directors, coaches, and teachers to have a common language while working together to improve classroom practices (See **Appendices H-J** for details on core instructional elements).

**Cost:** \$26,000 annually, based on 10 ramp-up classrooms and 4 directors.

**Recommendation 3:** Ensure each educator’s ability to fully participate in coaching, professional development, communities of practice, and required college coursework by supporting substitutes and semi-annual participant stipends.

**Cost:** \$34,000 estimated based on 10 classrooms; actual expenditures will vary slightly based on number of credit hours participants are taking and level of logistical support needed.



## Rationale and/or research base

These Ramp Up to NC Pre-K investments reduce the risks and initial costs for centers to participate in NC Pre-K, and they also increase the quality of new NC Pre-K classrooms.

In Buncombe County, there are currently ten 5-star private preschool providers, including church-based programs, who could become NC Pre-K providers in the future. However, in the current pandemic reality, most of these centers do not have the teaching staff or administrative capacity to fully implement NC Pre-K standards. In planning workgroups, current and potential NC Pre-K providers ranked the need for NC Pre-K specific coaching for both teachers and administrators as their top two priorities. They also stressed the necessity for time to learn and implement new program standards.

In programs that have only one NC Pre-K classroom, that lone teacher needs the involvement of administration to be successful. Beyond the obvious NC Pre-K classroom impacts, high-quality trainings and coaching specifically for program administrators ensures that investments in capacity “trickle down” to impact the whole center.

## Equity Implications

BPFC has worked with the county GIS Department to develop a series of maps with community-level demographic and economic information along with the location of ECE providers and the availability of publicly funded slots (See **Appendix K** for county map with publicly funded slots mapped against the Social Vulnerability Index by census tract). We can use these maps, along with data from the Single Portal of Entry, to identify parts of the county where BIPOC and NC Pre-K income-eligible families do not have a nearby NC Pre-K site, and prioritize programs in that area for NC Pre-K ramp-up to expand access to those communities.

Ramp-up supports and additional time to learn about and implement key programmatic components are essential for smaller centers to be able to participate in NC Pre-K. Currently, the resources and instructional supports needed to reach NC Pre-K standards are more than one administrative staff person can manage on their own. The NC Pre-K Advisory Committee is reluctant to approve a new NC Pre-K provider when the center has never utilized the required instructional components and does not have additional administrative supports, so this ramp-up support will make it possible for smaller centers to participate in NC Pre-K.

## Implementation Considerations

Ideally, this program would roll out at the same time as the fully funded NC Pre-K. As mentioned, it will probably take 2 years for most centers to be ready to implement NC Pre-K, and availability of licensed teaching staff is key to any significant expansion.

However, in our current context, the broader educational and career pipeline in Strategy Two is needed a year ahead of this to lay the groundwork for this ramp-up program's success, both growing a more robust teaching workforce as well as allowing program staff to identify local ECE programs that have teachers who are willing and able to pursue additional higher education. For a program to be successful in the Ramp Up to NC Pre-K, they must both have a committed director and a teacher willing to meet educational goals in the desired timeline.

The educational attainment issues outlined in the Implementation Considerations section under Strategy Two also apply to this ramp-up program: the challenges of balancing course schedules with full time teaching and family life, often unpredictable degree attainment timelines, and previously mentioned post-pandemic workforce challenges. Additionally, Buncombe County does not have a local higher education program that offers a bachelor's degree in ECE nor a B-K licensure program. Teachers interested in pursuing a BA in ECE and/or a B-K degree will need to complete their coursework online, which is not ideal for some students.

## Unintended Consequences

The following are potential negative impacts:

- With higher educational attainment, teachers may leave their current program to seek employment at other NC Pre-K programs and in kindergarten classrooms, causing higher turnover rates and increasing staffing frustrations in some programs.
- Higher numbers of T.E.A.C.H.™ scholarship participants per program can create staff scheduling challenges, even with available substitutes.
- One of the final courses in most B-K curricula involves a student teaching practicum, which must be completed at a program where the student is not currently employed. While the hours may vary by higher education institution, this can cause a temporary staffing problem for the student's current employer.





## STRATEGY FOUR:

### A coordinated outreach and enrollment plan that features a Single Portal of Entry

A single portal of entry will simplify the application process for families by having one online preschool application page for ALL publicly funded preschool options in Buncombe County (NC Pre-K and Head Start initially, with plans to expand to Early Head Start and private centers in the future). Actively promoting the portal to referral partners and directly to families will ensure families and those who work with families understand the value of preschool and know exactly where to find the preschool application that ensures a child will be placed in the best-fit program. The single portal also allows the community to collect unduplicated demographic and waitlist data, which has never been possible locally.

*NOTE: This strategy has been funded by ECEDF for FY2022 as a pilot program and will launch in early February. However, to become THE place our community members go for preschool, it needs to be a central, reliable pillar of Buncombe preschool infrastructure for years to come, which is why it is included in these recommendations.*

**Recommendation 1:** Commit to ongoing local support of an online platform where preschool applications are submitted, communications with families are tracked, and cross-program data are collected.

- In the fall of 2021, we contracted with SchoolMint to host and build out this application portal, so initial set-up costs have been invested already
- All preschool outreach efforts will point families to the landing page for this platform.
- This portal will act as the unduplicated waiting list for publicly funded preschool programs and allow us to analyze demographic and utilization data across multiple programs.

**Cost:** \$4,000 annually; possible increase if we significantly increase the programs involved/ number of applications coming through the portal.

**Recommendation 2:** Support a full-time, bilingual Buncombe Preschool Outreach & Enrollment Coordinator.

- Coordinator will assist families in using the portal, coordinate cross-program communications, conduct county-wide outreach to promote the use of the portal and the benefits of pre-K in general.
- Coordinator will be the data manager for applications coming in and facilitate cross-program communications for more coordinated placement of children to better meet the needs of families and maximize publicly funded slots.

**Cost:** \$72,500 recurring

**Recommendation 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.

**Cost:** \$10,000 recurring; NC Pre-K and Head Start will also be dedicating resources to this activity as available.

### Rationale and/or research base

A preschool single portal of entry is a win for families and the preschool system. Other communities who have implemented this type of system in NC and beyond have confirmed that preschool applications increased, and more slots were filled after implementation. Smart2Start in Virginia's Roanoke Valley (a 6-county region), is the most comprehensive initiative we found. Smart2Start has built a portal where families can submit an application for any child 0-5, for both public and private-pay slots. They were also able to expand within weeks of the pandemic shutting



K-12 schools down, allowing families to locate and apply to elementary age “learning pod” providers.

## Equity Implications

This strategy supports racial and economic equity across the preschool system. First, it gives our community more unduplicated data to understand who is applying and who is accessing publicly funded slots, so we can ensure those who have historically had less access to such programs are in fact accessing them at higher rates. Also, it reduces the disproportionate burden on families applying for publicly funded slots; under-resourced families searching for affordable preschool have an overwhelming list of to-do’s that private-pay families do not:

- Families must figure out what programs they are eligible for (when publicly funded programs have almost no budget for marketing)
- They must apply to each program separately, which means different applications, timelines, communication methods, etc.
- They must provide extensive documentation of all income in specified ways (which differ from program to program)
- They must know to ask which programs offer wrap-around care and which programs offer summer care
- They must know to apply for (or maintain) child care subsidy if they work or go to school
- Families with limited English often have to find their own interpreters to navigate these tasks

Internet access is not a barrier since families can call and complete the application with the Coordinator over the phone or in person.

## Implementation considerations

As mentioned, this strategy is already in progress with grant funding, officially launching in February 2022. However, as a core part of the local preschool infrastructure, funding for this strategy requires funding stability. With this coordinated outreach and enrollment in place, our community could easily promote and strategically fill slots from other funding sources in the future (for example, locally funded slots for families at higher incomes, or even with a sliding scale fee structure).

## Unintended Consequences

In the conversations with other communities, we have not learned of negative unintended consequences emerging from this strategy. One foreseeable result is that partner programs have less flexibility to change their own application and enrollment processes, but local partners have discussed this at length and continue to work with each other to build processes that work for all programs.

## STRATEGY FIVE:

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

A 6.5-hour instructional day, plus 90 minutes of planning/PD time (required in NC Pre-K program guidelines, though rarely met in our current staffing crisis), equals a full workday for NC Pre-K lead and assistant teachers. However, in Buncombe County, over 64% of children under six live in homes where all parents work. In ABPPC’s 2017 family survey, 35% of respondents said they needed a full-day, full-year preschool, and another 25% said they needed a full-day (but not summer) program. Many working families require an early A.M. drop-off time and an extended pick-up time at the end of the day. This before- and after-school care, along with summer care, is referred to as “wrap-around.”

Currently eight out of 29 NC Pre-K sites offer an extended day (roughly 7:30-5:30), and seven sites offer continuous summer care. In most cases, families either pay tuition for these extra hours of care or access a child care subsidy for wrap-around and summer care. However, subsidy has strict eligibility requirements which does not help families seeking work, or those piecing together several part-time jobs.

One reason our community has so few NC Pre-K sites offering wrap-around is because of the high volume of sites located within ACS and CAO/Head Start. Wrap care is extremely limited with these community partners while the six private NC Pre-K sites offer more wrap care throughout the year.

**Recommendation 1:** Pilot funding wrap-around services for up to 30 children who meet NC Pre-K eligibility requirements but are not eligible for subsidy.

- This pilot would allow us to use the Single Portal of Entry and related preschool promotion to understand how many more families would apply to NC Pre-K if full-day care at no charge were available.
- This pilot would only be available to families who could attend one of the sites that offer wrap-around care, so it does not address the larger issue of availability.

**Cost:** \$162,500; based on the 5-star subsidy reimbursement rate of 50% of the subsidy market rate for a 5-star center for full-day and 83% of the subsidy rate for summer care; Recurrence/expansion needs will depend on pilot results.

**Recommendation 2:** Conduct an in-depth demand and feasibility study related to full-year NC Pre-K expansion with the following goals:

- Explore structural supports to offer up to 10 hours of licensed care (7:30-5:30) and summer care for children at school-based NC Pre-K sites.
- Explore structural supports to ensure existing and future private NC Pre-K providers are able to fully meet the wrap-around needs of NC Pre-K families.
- Explore alternative community-based options, including unlicensed wrap-around and summer care, where subsidy funds cannot be leveraged but should be considered to promote racial equity and language justice. This option was first recommended in conversations with Latinx families in the Emma community, who want their children to engage with Spanish-speaking child care co-op members, or Raices (Spanish for roots), a program focused on strengthening cultural identity, (though they have barriers to becoming licensed programs). A similar idea arose as we worked with local developers of the REGAL model, the basis for ACS pandemic learning pods.

**Cost:** \$60,000; based on CCSA’s estimate for similar work in Durham.

### Rationale and/or research base

Expanding access to the NC Pre-K program requires increasing the availability of wrap-around care and adding summer-care options. West Ed’s Leandro report recommended expanding NC Pre-K to a full-day, full-year program. Other locally funded pre-k programs in NC have funded wrap-around services as a key component for expansion based on the needs of working families, as well as to help mitigate student learning loss before entering kindergarten<sup>24</sup>:

- Meck-K – 35 sites currently offer both before and after school care at an additional cost or via subsidy. Six more

sites (41 total) offer afterschool care only.<sup>25</sup>

- In Durham, the Smart Start Local Partnership designates subsidy funds to provide wrap-around care for 50 Durham Pre-K children. BPFC does not administer a subsidy program, so Buncombe is unable to designate funds in this manner. It should be noted that Durham Pre-K has not been completely successful in expanding 10-hour care days. Some programs in Durham stopped offering wrap-around care because the NC Pre-K/Durham Pre-K requirement for teachers to have 90 minutes of planning time made it difficult to cover the end of the day.
- Wake Pre-K has a separate allocation for wrap-around care using Smart Start funds.

Based on child care subsidy data, we know families who are likely eligible for NC Pre-K are choosing full-day options instead. The Buncombe County Child Care Subsidy Unit provided the total number of 4-year-old rising kindergarteners in Buncombe County who received full-time child care subsidy in 4- and 5-star licensed facilities:

Subsidy service period	Unduplicated children with full-day subsidy
FY 2020-21	209
September 2021 service month	126

Because income requirements of the subsidy and NC Pre-K programs are similar, this data suggests that if full-day, full-year care were available, many children with vouchers might take advantage of the NC Pre-K program (leaving vouchers for younger children).

Child Care subsidies should be fully leveraged for wrap- and summer-care for NC Pre-K. Unfortunately, a handful of families meet NC Pre-K eligibility but not subsidy eligibility. A simple first step to expand access to NC Pre-K is to provide families who are not eligible for subsidies some local funding to access wrap-around care. We expect this to be a small number of families. Addressing the larger challenge of making wrap-around easier for programs to staff and sustain, especially for children at public school sites, will take a level of research that was not feasible for this report, especially during the pandemic when staffing existing services is so overwhelming that providers had little patience to imagine expanding.

## Equity Implications

Making full-day, full-year care available is essential to achieving equitable access to NC Pre-K for families. Without it, only children whose families can pick them up in the middle of the day, or who can pay for, and find a spot in, wrap-around care can participate. Durham Pre-K's FY21-22 Equity Plan cites access to before and after care for families as its #1 strategy.<sup>26</sup>

Wrap-around options, if developed intentionally with our BIPOC communities, may also be an avenue for integrating more local culture, language, and identity into the NC Pre-K setting, and vice versa. Though still heavily regulated, it does not fall into the strict regulations of the NC Pre-K model, allowing more flexibility in activities and in the education level needed to provide it.

## Implementation considerations

Because the current pandemic makes this topic an especially difficult one to explore with our local providers (due to staffing crisis and limitations on combining students), and it will likely take a high level of research, innovation, and new partnerships, we recommend delaying implementation of the pilot until providers have more stable staffing.

For the pilot, or any other expansion of wrap-around, funding would need to be secured and locations confirmed the January before the school year of implementation, since the Single Portal of Entry platform would need to be developed to reflect new opportunities, and promotion of the preschool application starts in late January to early February for the following August entry.



## Unintended Consequences

There is some danger that NC Pre-K teachers, used to working a 10-month year, may choose to leave the field rather than lose their summer break. However, since summer wrap-around teachers do not have to meet NC Pre-K standards, providers could avoid this by hiring a different teacher for the summer (though less ideal for the children, who thrive on consistency of their trusted adults).



# STRATEGY SIX:

## Expanded transportation options

Expanding transportation for NC Pre-K is a high-impact but logistically challenging way to expand access. Transportation is not often provided due to high cost, strict regulations, and staffing demands. Durham Pre-K, which began in 2016, is just now starting to research ways to provide transportation because of these challenges.

Only three preschool programs in Buncombe County currently provide transportation, either by operating their own buses and vans, or by contracting with Emma Bus Lines: CAO, ACS, and Child Care Network. Preschool children with IEPs in BCS are offered regular busing, Exceptional Children's busing, or parents are reimbursed for mileage (See **Appendix L** for local transportation routes mapped against Social Vulnerability Index).

**Recommendation 1:** Pilot providing direct funding at \$100/month for up to 45 children to allow families to arrange their own transportation to NC Pre-K (via public bus, friends & neighbors, Uber, etc.).

- This allows families who may have a vehicle but not gas money, or who could ride the bus or ride with a neighbor if they could pay, the opportunity to leverage their own resources to arrange transportation.
- This pilot will allow us to learn more about how many families have these resources to leverage; also allows expanding transportation without the up-front expense of purchasing vehicles.

**Cost:** \$53,500; **Recurrence/expansion needs will depend on results of the pilot.**

**Recommendation 2:** Conduct an in-depth demand and feasibility study related to preschool transportation. Questions to address include:

- How many rural Buncombe families would engage in NC Pre-K if transportation were offered?
- How many new providers would be willing to manage a bus/van and daily transportation provision if costs were supported?
- How many providers would engage with a 3rd party transportation provider (e.g., Emma Bus Lines) to provide transportation if costs were supported?
- What are the pros/cons of per-child reimbursement vs. per-route reimbursement
- How are other states directly reimbursing families for transportation (e.g., Oregon)?
- How are other NC counties addressing pre-k transportation needs?

**Cost:** \$60,000; **based on CCSA's estimate for similar work in Durham.**

**Recommendation 3:** Pilot providing a per-child reimbursement rate of \$100/month for up to 45 children to NC Pre-K providers who currently offer transportation.

- This pilot allows providers who have the transportation infrastructure to add more children who may not even apply to NC Pre-K otherwise.
- The opportunity to expand in this way may be quite limited, since two of the three providers who offer transportation have extra eligibility requirements (Head Start=lower income eligibility; ACS=must live in school district), and the ability to add more children on any route is dependent on the additional time it adds (not to exceed 1 hour total).

**Cost:** \$53,500; **Recurrence/expansion needs will depend on results of the pilot.**

**Recommendation 4:** Use targeted community outreach and the Single Portal of Entry to advertise transportation availability. Analyze application data to assess transportation needs over time.

**Cost:** \$0

## Rationale and/or research base

BPFC conducted three case studies with the following NC Pre-K providers who currently offer transportation: Community Action Opportunities/Head Start, Childcare Network, Asheville City Schools. These case studies highlighted a long list of common challenges and few feasible opportunities to expand pre-k transportation. Emma Bus Lines is the sole provider of contracted transportation services for young children in this area. Despite many attempts, we could get no information from them about their capacity to expand (driver shortages have left them in the same dire position as public schools).

Without a much deeper understanding of the need for and potential impact of NC Pre-K transportation, especially for families in Buncombe County's more rural areas, BPFC chose not to recommend significant investments in vehicles or contracts for bus routes. The demand and feasibility study is essential, and the two recommended pilot projects offer more immediate ways to test the impact of small changes.

## Equity Implications

There is much we don't know about providing transportation for NC Pre-K, including the feasibility of bus runs in rural areas of the county and the broader need for transportation. We do know that if a family has no access to transportation, pre-k is not an option. We also know, through studying ACS and Head Start's transportation provision, that most of the children who take advantage of buses they provide live in Asheville Housing Authority communities, suggesting that offering transportation is necessary to increase access to families with the least financial resources.

## Implementation considerations

This strategy's implementation is recommended as **Year 2 or beyond**. However, one or both of the pilots could be implemented sooner, though funding for the pilot would need to be secure by the January before the start of the school year of implementation, so that the Single Portal of Entry can be built out in a way that highlights the added transportation options and asks questions to identify pilot candidates. The feasibility study would be more effective after local ECE, K-12, and private transportation providers have a more stable workforce and could consider expansion.

## Some things these recommendations do not address

- BPFC had no clear sense, as we drafted this report, of when county investments in pre-k expansion will begin or at what level. We also cannot predict when the state will make NC Pre-K expansion slots available. Therefore, we did not develop **multi-year roll-out scenarios** at this point. However, we would be eager to work with the County to develop more detailed multi-year plans as a path forward becomes clear.
- Though we listed the direct costs for each "a la carte" strategy, we did not at this point include the more general **administrative costs**. Several of the recommendations would require significant financial services and monitoring, but the administrative costs depend on where different programs are housed and how they are implemented. An 8-10% administrative cost would be a reasonable, general estimate.
- The timing of this report means there are several larger **federal and state initiatives that may impact the NC Pre-K landscape and funding**. American Rescue Plan funds are just starting to reach local providers and may help with teacher recruitment and retention. The General Assembly refused to fund the Leandro recommendations, but the court case continues, and a portion of that funding is designated for the NC Pre-K Program, including increased reimbursement and administrative rates, teachers' salaries, and expanded hours. The president's Build Back Better plan includes universal preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds, if that were to pass. However, we cannot continue to wait for state and national politics to play out when needs are local and urgent. BPFC suggests moving forward, understanding that any county funding should be applied to local preschool initiatives last, after federal and state allocations are exhausted.
- BPFC's planning activities focused on large, structural solutions to increase NC Pre-K access and ensure NC Pre-K quality across sites. It did not attempt to address **more program-level change**, such as increasing culturally responsive practices or better aligning pre-k and K-5 curricula. This is work our community needs to



pursue in all ECE settings.

## Future Considerations

- An ongoing issue not directly addressed in the recommendations of this report is the need in NC Pre-K for **strong systems approach to social/emotional/behavioral supports for teachers**. Teachers in all classrooms are asking for, and need, this support, especially as the pandemic raises stress and brings a wave of new teachers into challenging classrooms unprepared. However, NC Pre-K does prioritize enrollment for children with higher support needs, so behavioral health issues are often concentrated. The NC Pre-K program locally has seen an increase in the number of children exhibiting physically dangerous behaviors. The ECE community needs to address this systematically rather than program-by-program, to be more efficient with scarce resources and more equitable.
- Another issue ABPPC work groups discussed at great length is **benefits parity for educators**. Even if we achieve pay parity with K-12, public school benefits packages will always be more comprehensive than those private centers can offer. We chose to start with wages while continuing to work on the more complicated issue of how to provide a strong benefits package to teachers in so many different settings.
- A central issue that came up in every family focus group we conducted, and that Mecklenburg and Durham addressed in their locally-funded pre-k models, is that the **income eligibility threshold for NC Pre-K** is too low. If a family makes \$1 over the limit, they are denied free, high-quality NC Pre-K and are expected to pay full price for private childcare (over \$725-1,000/month). Families are quick to note that NC Pre-K's eligibility formula does not take into consideration Asheville's skyrocketing housing costs, and they wished it considered other fixed expenses like student loans. Both Meck Pre-K and Durham Pre-K increased the limit to 400% of the federal poverty limit, with a sliding scale fee structure above that. Buncombe County has chosen to focus on NC Pre-K, but the county could still fund, or partially fund, slots for children above NC Pre-K's income limit for those families who make too much to be in NC Pre-K but not nearly enough to pay private child care tuition. BPFC would be eager to partner with the county to pilot this in the future.

# Glossary of frequently used abbreviations and terms

**ABPPC** – Asheville Buncombe Preschool Planning Collaborative

**B-K** – Birth through Kindergarten licensure, the professional education license for teachers of children birth through kindergarten, required for all NC Pre-K teachers

**CAO/HS** – Community Action Opportunities/Head Start – Buncombe County's Head Start program, a federally funded program that provides free child care for children ages 3 to 5 years old who are income eligible

**Child Care Subsidy (also called Child Care Vouchers)** – The Child Care Subsidy program uses state and federal funds to provide subsidized child care in the form of a voucher for families who have a qualifying need (working, looking for work, training/school, child in foster or protective services) and are income eligible (200% of federal poverty limit). Vouchers can be used at any participating child care program. Families must pay a co-pay of 10% of their gross family income.

**Developmental Day** – Child care funded by the public school systems' Exceptional Children program to support children who have an individual education plan. In Buncombe County, all but a few Developmental Day slots are in private child care settings, in NC Pre-K classrooms.

**DCDEE** – Division of Child Development & Early Education, a division within the NC Health & Human Services Department which regulates and licenses child care programs, including NC Pre-K (but not Head Start, which falls under the Department of Instruction).

**ECE** – Early Childhood Education, or Early Care and Education

**NC Pre-K** – The NC Pre-Kindergarten Program

**T.E.A.C.H.™** – T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Scholarship Program, a statewide program administered by Child Care Services Association that provides a variety of different scholarships in partnership with NC community colleges and 16 universities offering degrees in early childhood education and child development.

**WAGE\$™** - The NC WAGE\$ Project provides education-based salary supplements to low-paid teachers, directors and family child care providers working with children between the ages of birth to five in participating counties.

**WDP** - Workforce Development Program, a free program run by Buncombe Partnership for Children focused on recruitment and retention of early educators that provides training, substitute placement, coaching, and higher education support.

# Resources

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- <sup>26</sup> Chapter 10: Transportation Safety. (n.d.). In *Child Care Center Handbook*. NC Division of Child Development & Early Education. [https://ncchildcare.ncdhhs.gov/portals/0/documents/pdf/c/center\\_chp10.pdf](https://ncchildcare.ncdhhs.gov/portals/0/documents/pdf/c/center_chp10.pdf)

# Appendix

## APPENDIX A:

# Full Recommendations Table

NC Pre-K Expansion Recommendations Summary Table				
Strategy	Recommendation	Proposed	Cost to county (est. year 1)	Notes
Fully funded NC Pre-K program	1. Supplement per-child reimbursement rate	Year 1	\$825,000	Will increase as slots increase
	2. Mandate K-12 pay parity for licensed lead teachers	Year 1	\$49,200	Will increase as slots increase & as K-12 pay increases
	3. Mandate living wage for teacher assistants	Year 1	\$0	Covered in increased reimbursement rate
	4. Support NC Pre-K Program Consultant	Year 1	\$0	May require county funding as program grows
	<b>TOTAL COST (Year 1)</b>		<b>\$874,200</b>	
Comprehensive education/ career pipeline	1. Fund one Ed Attainment Coach to support teachers through B-K licensure	Year 1	\$69,000	Consistent annual expenditure
	2. Fund AB Tech ECE-specific tutor	Year 1	\$8,300	May be funded through AB Tech in future years if well utilized
	3. Support full participation in activities	Year 1	\$54,000	
	<b>TOTAL COST (Year 1)</b>		<b>\$131,300</b>	
Ramp-up to NC Pre-K Supports	1. Fund one Ramp-up Program Coach	Year 2	\$72,500	Consistent annual expenditure per cohort
	2. Provide NC Pre-K-focused instructional tools and PD	Year 2	\$26,000	
	4. Support full participation in activities	Year 2	\$34,000	
	<b>TOTAL COST (Year 2)</b>		<b>\$132,500</b>	



Preschool Single Portal of Entry	1. Support annual online application portal	Year 1	\$4,000	All 3 recommendations are funded through ECEDF for 2021-22, but it should be a core component of preschool expansion
	2. Support Outreach & Enrollment Coordinator	Year 1	\$72,500	
	3. Fund key promotion activities	Year 1	\$10,000	
	<b>TOTAL COST (Year 1)</b>		<b>\$86,500</b>	
Research & pilot to increase wrap-around options	1. Leverage Child Care Subsidy funding	Year 2	\$0	Work with Single Portal of Entry to identify opportunities
	2. Pilot funding wrap-around for subsidy-ineligible families	Year 2	\$162,500	
	3. Conduct a demand & feasibility study	Year 2	\$60,000	
	<b>TOTAL COST (Year 2+)</b>		<b>\$222,500</b>	
Research & pilot to increase transportation options	1. Pilot direct support to families for arranging transportation	Year 2+	\$54,000	
	2. Conduct a demand & feasibility study	Year 2+	\$60,000	
	3. Pilot paying providers who do offer limited transportation to expand	Year 2+	\$54,000	
	4. Use Single Portal of Entry to gauge demand	Year 2+	\$0	
	<b>TOTAL COST (Year 2+)</b>		<b>\$168,000</b>	

## APPENDIX B:

# NC Pre-K Differentiated Rate Structure

Because NC Pre-K children are served in a variety of settings for a mixed model of child care delivery across North Carolina, the state reimbursement rates must recognize and account for the fact that some of those settings (particularly Head Start and public school districts) have additional funding sources for NC Pre-K slots.

NC Pre-K Reimbursement Rates		
Provider Type	Annual STATE Base Rates per Child In Each Setting	Annual BUNCOMBE Rates per Child*
Private Provider**	\$6,500	\$7,280
Public School	\$4,370	\$5,300
Head Start***	Minimum of \$3000 Maximum of \$4000	\$3440 for 121 slots; \$4000 for 94 slots

\* The local NC Pre-K Advisory Committee successfully advocated for a 12% increase for private and public school sites effective FY2019

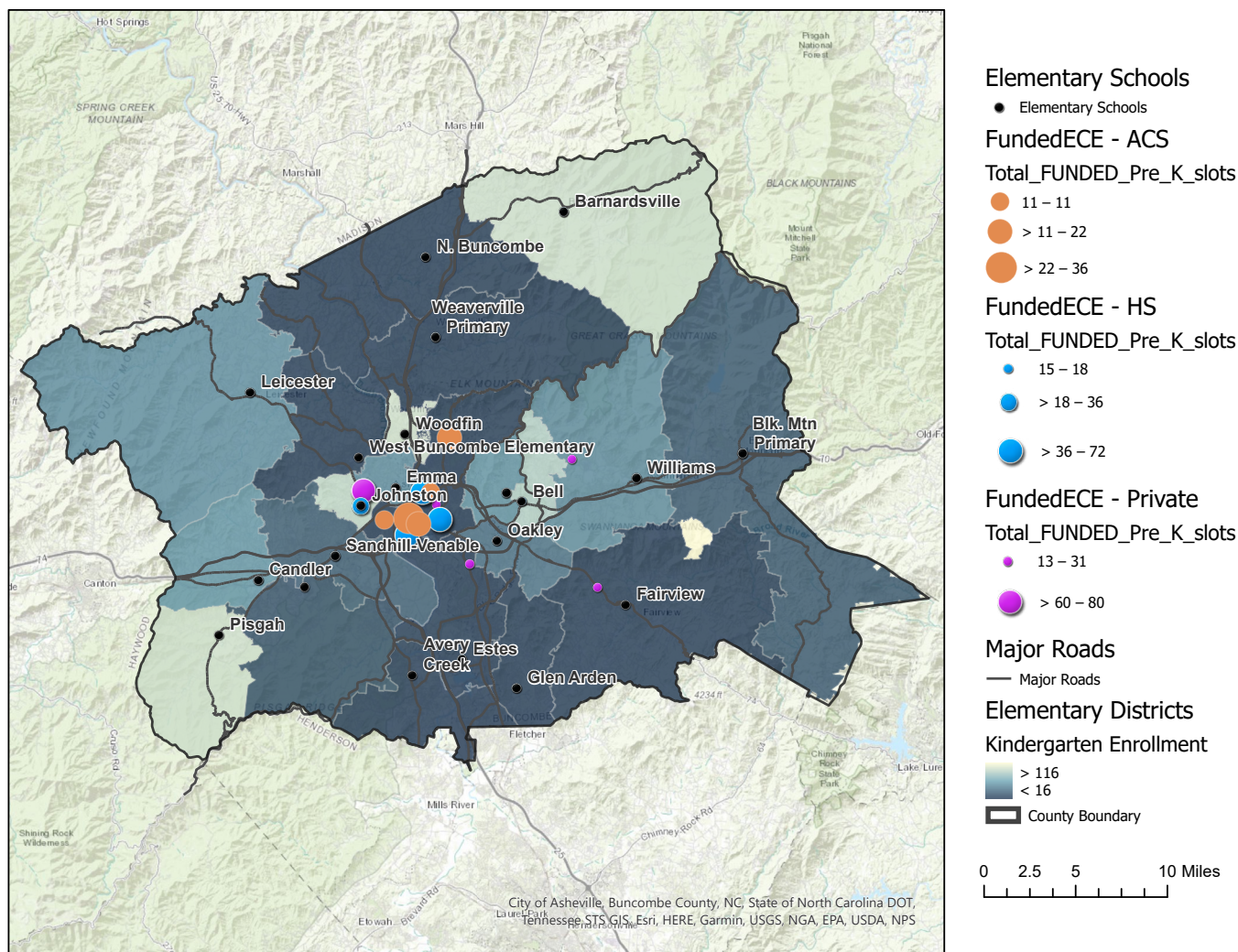
\*\*Private provider rates are reduced by up to \$100/month when the lead teacher does not hold a teaching license

\*\*\* Head Starts rates are set at the local level within the minimum of \$3000 to the maximum of \$4000.

## APPENDIX C:

# Map of Publicly Funded slots and Kindergarten Enrollment

## Funded ECE Data Points





APPENDIX D:

# Proposed Reimbursement Details

Current Reimbursment Rate				Recommended Reimbursment Rate Based on True Cost of Care			
Provider Type	Funded Slots	Current NC Pre-K Annual Rate	% of Full Annual Rate of \$7280	Proposed Annual Rate	Increase from current rate	% of Full Annual Rate of \$9900	Funds needed to cover the increase
Private	153	\$7,280	100%	\$9,900	\$2,620	100%	\$400,860
Public School	73	\$5,300	73%	\$7,227	\$1,927	73%	\$140,671
Head Start A	94.5	\$4,000	55%	\$5,445	\$1,445	55%	\$136,553
Head Start B	121	\$3,440	47%	\$4,653	\$1,213	47%	\$146,773
\$2,295,220 State Funding				\$824,857 Amount Needed			

The above table outlines how local funds would supplement the per-slot reimbursement rate from the state for each provider type/differentiated reimbursement level.

## APPENDIX E:

# Local K-12 Salary Scales and Proposed Pre-K Scale

	State's BASE SALARY		BCS Scale		ACS Scale		NC Pre-K Scale (proposed)	
Years on license	BA	MA	BA	MA	BA	MA	BA	MA
0-1	35,000.00	38,500.00	37,975.00	41,772.50	38,150.00	41,965.00	38,150.00	41,965.00
2	36,000.00	39,600.00	39,060.00	42,966.00	39,240.00	43,164.00	39,240.00	43,164.00
3	37,000.00	40,700.00	40,145.00	44,159.50	40,330.00	44,363.00	40,330.00	44,363.00
4	38,000.00	41,800.00	41,230.00	45,353.00	41,420.00	45,562.00	41,420.00	45,562.00
5	39,000.00	42,900.00	42,705.00	46,975.50	42,705.00	46,975.50	42,705.00	46,975.50
6	40,000.00	44,000.00	43,800.00	48,180.00	43,800.00	48,180.00	43,800.00	48,180.00
7	41,000.00	45,100.00	44,895.00	49,384.50	44,895.00	49,384.50	44,895.00	49,384.50
8	42,000.00	46,200.00	45,990.00	50,589.00	45,990.00	50,589.00	45,990.00	50,589.00
9	43,000.00	47,300.00	47,085.00	51,793.50	47,085.00	51,793.50	47,085.00	51,793.50
10	44,000.00	48,400.00	48,620.00	53,482.00	48,400.00	53,240.00	48,620.00	53,482.00
11	45,000.00	49,500.00	49,725.00	54,697.50	49,500.00	54,450.00	49,725.00	54,697.50
12	46,000.00	50,600.00	50,830.00	55,913.00	50,600.00	55,660.00	50,830.00	55,913.00
13	47,000.00	51,700.00	51,935.00	57,128.50	51,700.00	56,870.00	51,935.00	57,128.50
14	48,000.00	52,800.00	53,040.00	58,344.00	52,800.00	58,080.00	53,040.00	58,344.00
15	49,000.00	53,900.00	54,635.00	60,098.50	53,900.00	59,290.00	54,635.00	60,098.50
16-19	50,000.00	55,000.00	55,750.00	61,325.00	55,000.00	60,500.00	55,750.00	61,325.00
20-24	50,000.00	55,000.00	56,250.00	61,875.00	58,250.00	64,075.00	58,250.00	64,075.00
25	50,000.00	55,000.00	56,250.00	62,425.00	58,250.00	64,075.00	58,250.00	64,075.00
26+	52,000.00	57,200.00	58,500.00	64,922.00	60,580.00	66,638.00	60,580.00	66,638.00
30+	52,000.00		60,320.00		60,580.00		60,580.00	

Shading indicates the higher pay of the two systems at each education level. No current NCPK teachers have a master's degree.

### Local Pay Scale Calculations

BCS Scale Calculation		ACS Scale Calculation		Proposed NC Pre-K (HYBRID) Calculation	
Years on License	% of state base salary		% of state base salary		% of state base salary
0-4	8.50%		9%		9%
5-9	9.50%		9.50%		9.50%
10-14	10.50%		10%		10.50%
15-19	11.50%		10%		11.50%
20-24	12.50%		16.50%		16.50%
25-29	13.50%		16.50%		16.50%
30+	16.00%		16.50%		16.50%

Because NC Pre-K competes with both school systems for licensed Birth-Kindergarten teachers, and private child care will never be able to provide benefits that compete with state employee benefits, we propose NC Pre-K use a HYBRID PAY SCALE that pays the higher amount of the two school systems at each year on the scale.

## APPENDIX F:

# Proposed Teacher Supplement Payment

for private centers to be able to retain experienced teachers

NC Pre-K Scale proposed; based on hybrid of ACS & BCS Scales			Required Annual Supplement Payment for Teachers at each experience level
Years on license	BA		
0-1	\$38,150	-38150	\$0
2	\$39,240	-38150	\$1,090
3	\$40,330	-38150	\$2,180
4	\$41,420	-38150	\$3,270
5	\$42,705	-38150	\$4,555
6	\$43,800	-38150	\$5,650
7	\$44,895	-38150	\$6,745
8	\$45,990	-38150	\$7,840
9	\$47,085	-38150	\$8,935
10	\$48,620	-38150	\$10,470
11	\$49,725	-38150	\$11,575
12	\$50,830	-38150	\$12,680
13	\$51,935	-38150	\$13,785
14	\$53,040	-38150	\$14,890
15	\$54,635	-38150	\$16,485
16-19	\$55,750	-38150	\$17,600
20-24	\$58,250	-38150	\$20,100
25	\$58,250	-38150	\$20,100
26+	\$60,580	-38150	\$22,430
30+	\$60,580	-38150	\$22,430

The proposed per-child reimbursement covers pay for teachers with 0-1 years experience. They get no salary supplement.

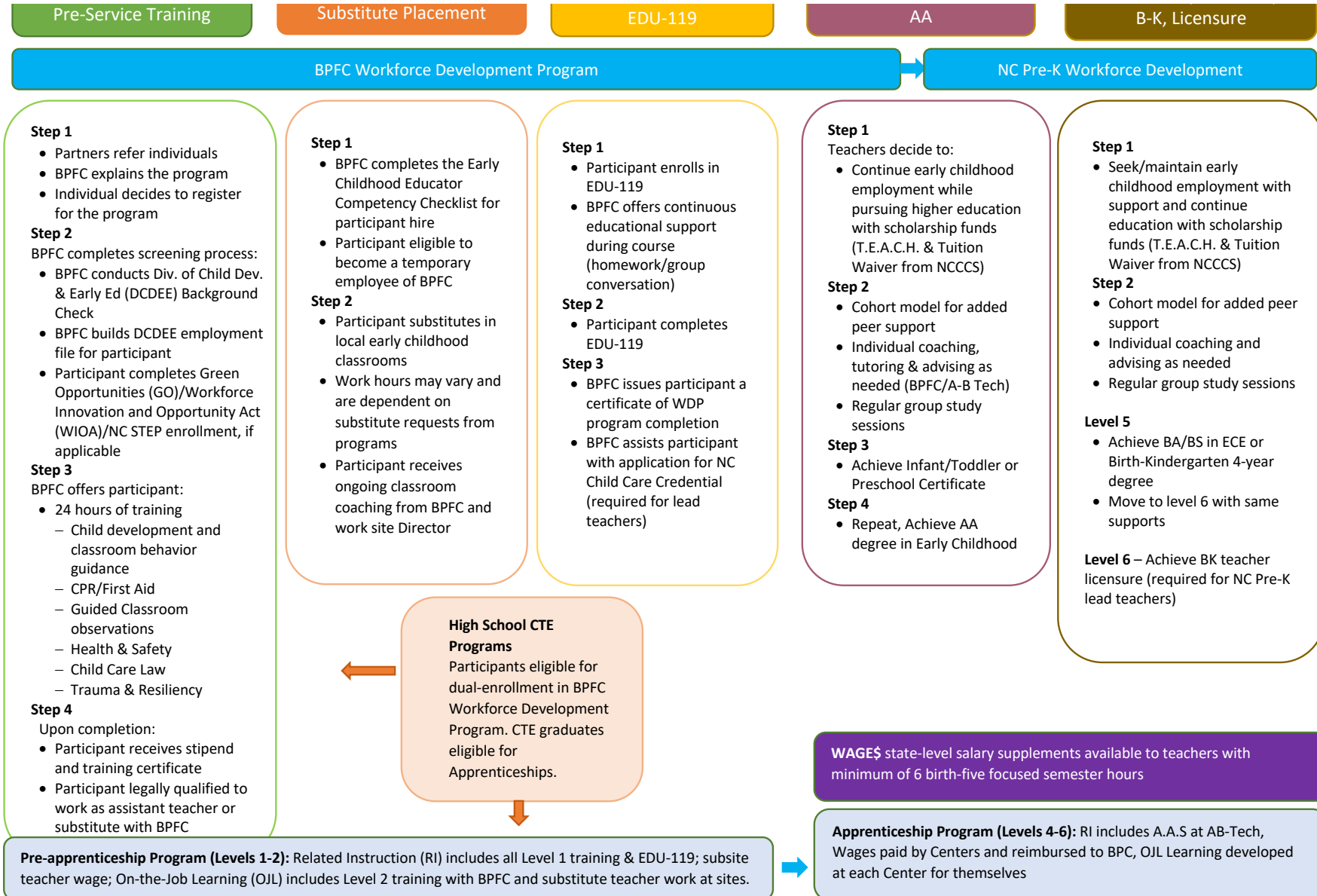
For teachers with 2+ years of experience, the education supplement is calculated by subtracting the first-year teacher amount (\$38,150) from the required salary, based on their years of experience. This is the amount the per-child reimbursement rate does not cover.

The supplement payment ensures private centers can pay more experienced teachers on the pay scale, supporting teacher retention and equity across NC Pre-K settings.



## APPENDIX G:

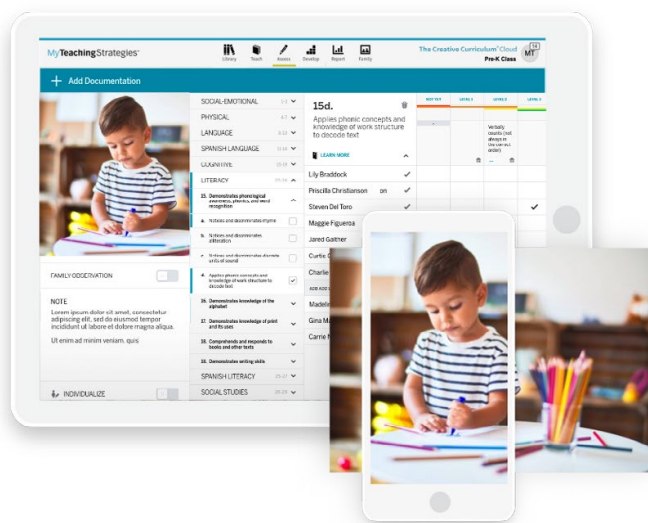
# ECE Education and Career Pipeline



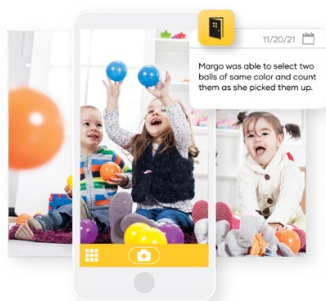
# APPENDIX H: GOLD<sup>®</sup> by Teaching Strategies



Move beyond  
measurement.  
Drive differentiated,  
effective instruction.



## Formative Assessment Made Easy for Teachers

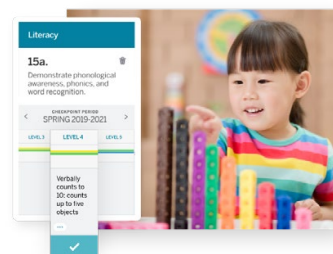


### Capture Observations in the Moment

Inform instruction without disruption by embedding authentic, observation-based assessment embedded in your everyday interactions with children.

### Understand Each Child's Needs Based on Developmentally Appropriate Milestones

Uniquely inclusive of all learners, GOLD<sup>®</sup> follows widely held expectations for children from birth through third grade and enables a whole-child approach to assessment.

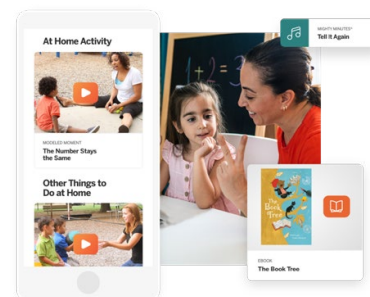


### Connect the Dots Between Curriculum and Assessment

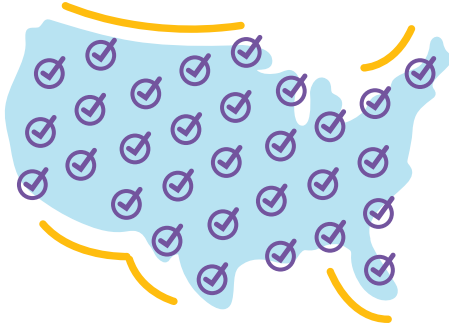
Automatically connect assessment data and observation capabilities with daily instructional resources, creating an instantaneous and ongoing feedback loop of information to individualize learning.

### Strengthen Family Partnerships

Enable family observations, share family-facing learning resources, and engage in two-way communication.



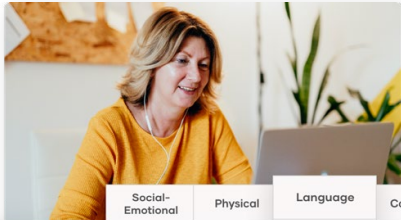
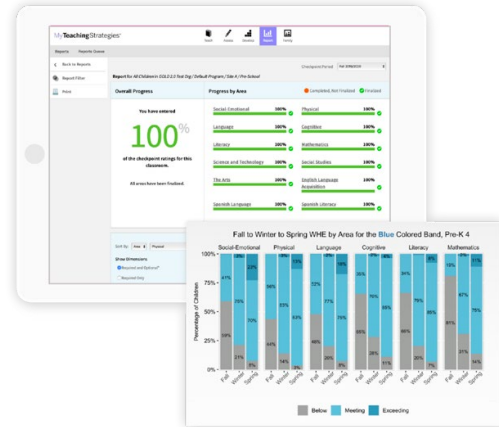
## Formative Assessment Made Powerful for Administrators



**Aligned to Your Early Learning Standards**  
**GOLD®** aligns to early learning guidelines in each state and the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework.

### Data-Driven Decisions in Real Time

**GOLD®** provides administrators with the data they need for real-time reporting and large-scale, programmatic decision-making.

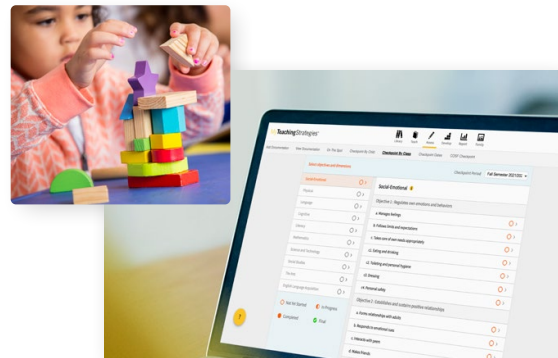


	Social-Emotional	Physical	Language	Cognitive
Benjamin, Kindergarten	🔴	🟢	🟢	🟢
Stacey, Kindergarten	🟡	🔴	🟢	🟢
Alex, Kindergarten	🟢	🔴	🟢	🟡

**Reliably Administer Valid Assessment**  
 Rigorously and regularly tested, **GOLD®** yields reliable, valid, and culturally sensitive information.

### Research-Based

**GOLD®** is research-based, validated, and shown to be effective by extensive independent research.



## Drive better learning outcomes.

Learn how you can get started with observation-based formative assessment in your classrooms.

**Talk to an expert.**



**Discover GOLD® today.**





# APPENDIX I: CLASS Research Summary 2017



## Research Confirming Improved Outcomes with CLASS®

### The Research Origins of CLASS

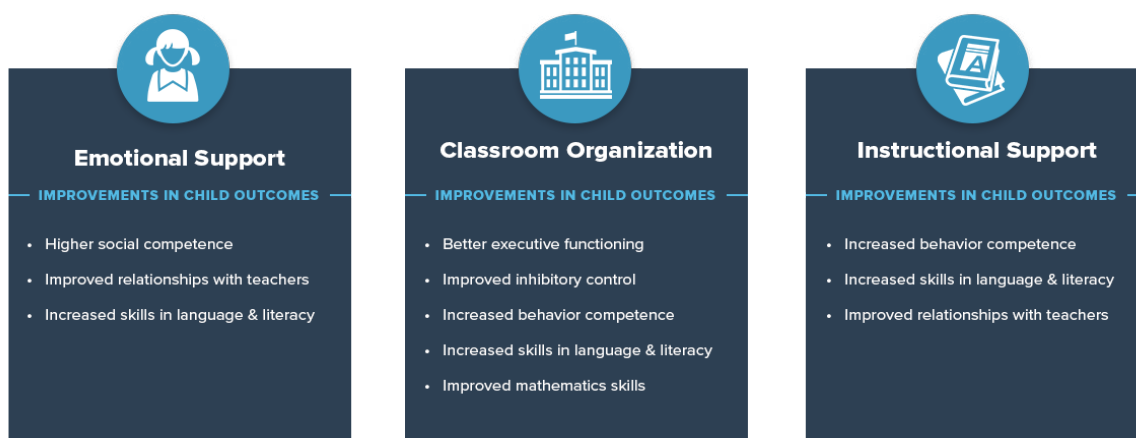
Research leading to the current version of the CLASS tool began in 1991 as a part of the NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development, which examined the influence of early environments and classroom processes on the development of children from a variety of family backgrounds. Study findings clearly indicated that classroom processes impact student outcomes (NICHD EECRN, 2002; Pianta et al., 2005).

With this knowledge, the research team further refined the initial observational tool (the Classroom Observation System: COS) for use in the National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCEDL) study. This large-scale study examined the quality of publicly funded preschool programs to learn how variations in quality impacted children's academic and social outcomes.

Data from both the NICHD and NCEDL studies clearly show that students who attend classrooms with higher CLASS scores have better social and academic outcomes (Early et al., 2008; NICHD EECRN, 2002). However, research on the CLASS did not stop with those two studies. Indeed, the CLASS tool is the most highly researched assessment tool for measuring the quality of teacher-child interactions.

### Research Connecting CLASS with Improved Child Outcomes

Multiple research studies indicate that students who attend classrooms that are rated higher on the CLASS have better social and academic outcomes. This holds true across the three domains of Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support.



Students in pre-K classrooms with high levels of Emotional Support display higher social competence and positive engagement with their teachers (Burchinal et al., 2010; Curby et al., 2009; Mashburn et

al., 2008). Furthermore, students enrolled in classrooms that provide a high level of Emotional Support demonstrate higher achievement in language and literacy (Curby & Chavez, 2013; Guo et al., 2010), as well as mathematics (Burchinal et al., 2014).

Effective Classroom Organization leads to better executive functioning (Hamre et al., 2014), improved inhibitory control (Hamre et al., 2014; Weiland et al., 2013), and increased behavior competence (Burchinal et al., 2014). In addition, higher levels of Classroom Organization are associated with better language and literacy skills (Hamre et al., 2014; Maier, et al., 2012; Xu, 2014;) and mathematics skills (Keys, et al., 2013).

Instructional Support is positively associated with behavior competence (Burchinal et al., 2014) and teacher closeness (Hamre et al., 2014; Howes et al., 2008). Students in classrooms that provide higher levels of Instructional Support demonstrate increased skills in language and literacy (Hamre et al., 2014; Mashburn, et al., 2009). Moiduddin, et al., 2012).

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## APPENDIX J:

# CLASS Research Summary 2018

## CLASS® Group Coaching (MMCI)

CLASS Group Coaching (MMCI) is an interactive course for teachers led by a Teachstone®-trained coach in your organization. Over the course of multiple sessions, your coach provides in-person training to a group of teachers, preparing them to identify, understand, and apply stronger CLASS® interactions in their classrooms.

### Who Uses CLASS Group Coaching?

- Organizations seeking to build foundational CLASS knowledge throughout their teacher population, with an emphasis on training a large number of teachers efficiently
- Organizations wanting to provide a face-to-face group coaching experience for teachers
- Organizations that have an existing coaching structure or are intending to develop one for supporting teacher growth



### Why CLASS Group Coaching?

#### Coaches who learn to provide the CLASS Group Coaching program:

- Become in-house experts who support teacher growth and drive targeted improvements
- Acquire the skills and credentials needed to develop teaching proficiency in the CLASS-based methodology
- Gain confidence in providing CLASS-based feedback to teachers
- Strengthen their training and facilitation skills
- Create capacity to build CLASS proficiency throughout their organization in an on-going way

#### Teachers who participate in the CLASS Group Coaching program:

- Learn to identify and describe effective interactions in the classroom
- Build skills, insights, and strategies to apply CLASS concepts to their teaching
- Feel more connected to and supported by their colleagues through collaborative peer learning

### What age levels are available for CLASS Group Coaching?



Teachstone®

☎ 877-401-8007

✉ [learnmore@teachstone.com](mailto:learnmore@teachstone.com)

🏠 [www.teachstone.com](http://www.teachstone.com)



## What Materials are Included in CLASS Group Coaching (MMCI)?

Teachstone provides all the materials you need:

- **Coaches receive:** Coach Guides, yearlong support from a Group Coaching Specialist, a copy of teacher materials, and access to exemplary classroom videos
- **Teachers who participate in group coaching receive:** access to exemplary classroom videos, Group Coaching Participant Guides, and CLASS Dimensions Guides

## Can I get CEUs?

As an IACET Accredited Provider, we offer CEUs to empower educators as lifelong learners and professionals. Teachers receive the following CEUs for completing the series of CLASS Group Coaching sessions:

- Pre K Teachers receive 2.0 CEUs
- Infant/Toddler Teachers receive 2.4 CEUs
- K-3 Teachers receive 2.4 CEUs



## Prerequisites

Participants must be a certified CLASS Observer in the age level for which they are seeking CLASS Group Coaching certification

## How does CLASS Group Coaching work?

<b>Coaches who attend CLASS Group Coaching Training</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Participate in 3-day CLASS Group Coaching Training</li><li>• Increase CLASS knowledge and practice leading others to understand effective interactions</li><li>• Strengthen training and facilitation skills</li></ul>
<b>Coaches who deliver CLASS Group Coaching program with Teachstone support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Deliver a series of workshops to participants which varies by age level</li><li>• Provide CLASS based feedback to participants using the myTeachstone learning resources</li><li>• Engage in yearlong support where Teachstone CLASS Specialists provide coaches with ongoing feedback regarding coaching skills</li></ul>
<b>Teachers who participate in group coaching sessions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Participate in a series of workshops engaging with their peers</li><li>• Watch videos of effective teaching from real classrooms through the myTeachstone learning resources</li><li>• Discuss effective interactions in videos and the settings in which they work</li></ul>

Want to learn more? Contact us for pricing and availability.

Teachstone®

📞 877-401-8007

✉️ [learnmore@teachstone.com](mailto:learnmore@teachstone.com)

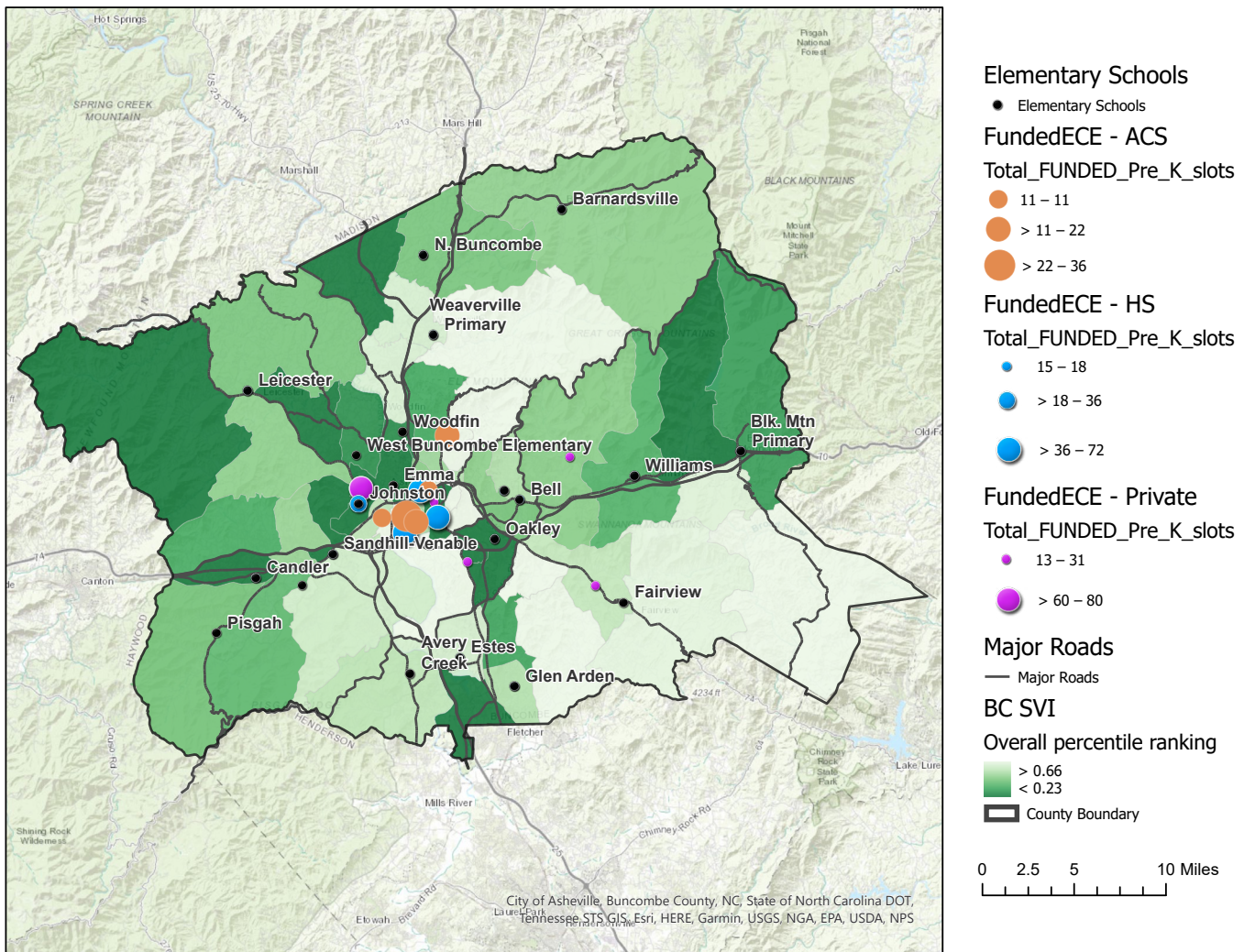
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## APPENDIX K:

# Map of Publicly Funded Slots and Social Vulnerability

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) originally developed the [Social Vulnerability Index \(SVI\)](#) to help identify what kinds of supports and resources different communities would need in natural disasters. The SVI is a composite of 15 external factors (from US Census data), including poverty, lack of transportation, crowded housing, and language diversity.

## Funded ECE Data Points



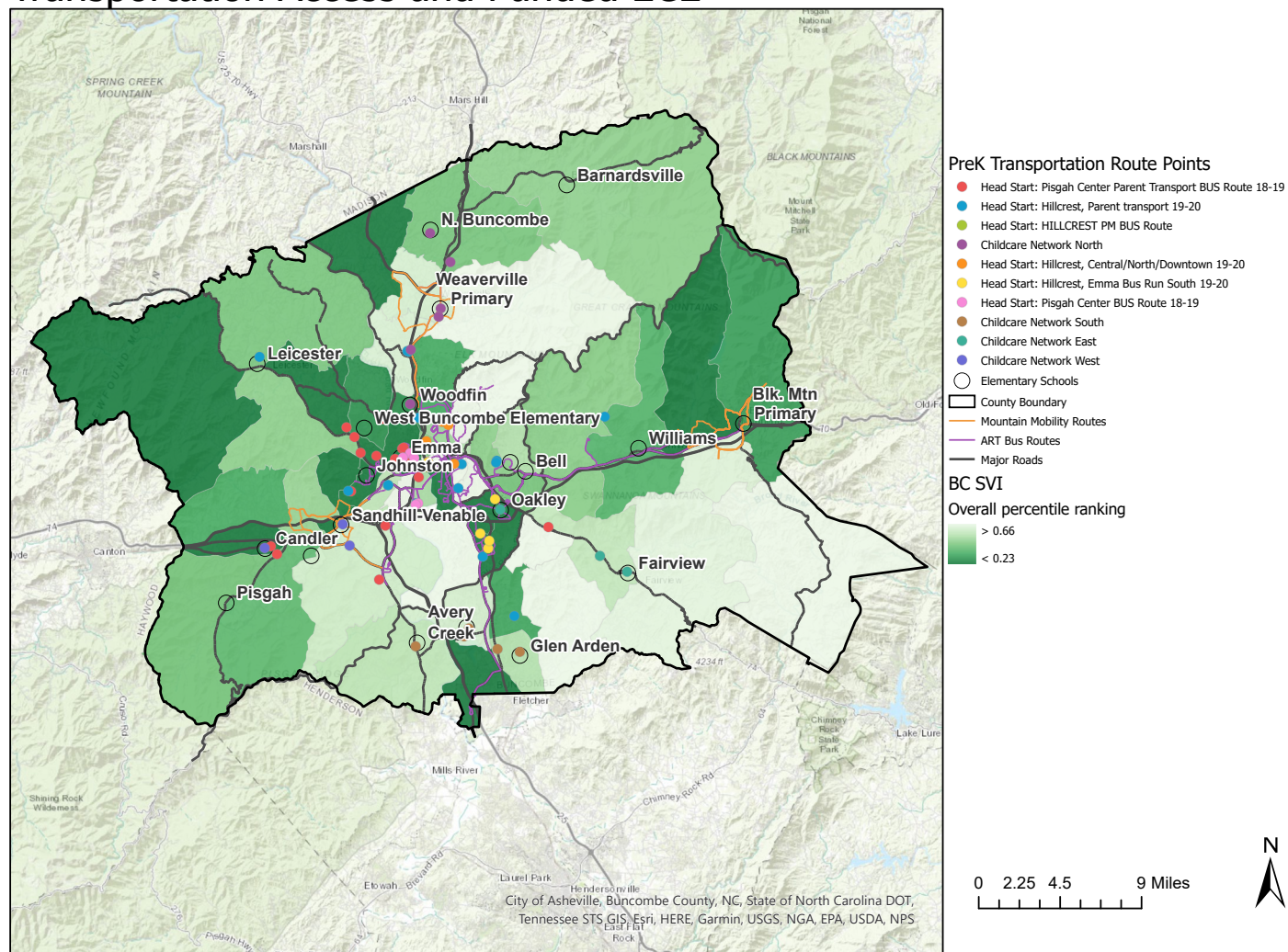


## APPENDIX L:

# Transportation Access and Funded ECE on Social Vulnerability Index (by census tract)

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) originally developed the [Social Vulnerability Index](#) (SVI) to help identify what kinds of supports and resources different communities would need in natural disasters. The SVI is a composite of 15 external factors (from US Census data), including poverty, lack of transportation, crowded housing, and language diversity.

## Transportation Access and Funded ECE





# Buncombe Partnership for Children

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a partner in the  
smart start network

