



Educational Attainment + Workforce Collaborative

LAND OF SKY REGION

landofskycollaborative.org

Less than half of North Carolinians ages 25-44 and even fewer from economically disadvantaged backgrounds currently have the qualifications to fill these roles. By the year **2030**, North Carolina needs **2 million** employees with high-quality credentials to meet workforce demands.

Forecasts show the state will have a shortfall of 400,000 skilled employees and 10,000 within our four-county region of Buncombe, Henderson, Madison, and Transylvania. In total, we need **82,000** students in our region with the education and skills to bridge the gap and help our state reach **2 million**.

The Land of Sky Educational Attainment and Workforce Collaborative focuses on aligning educational achievements with the skills employers need.

History

In 2018, North Carolina's thought leaders in education, business, faith-based and nonprofit communities, representatives from the North Carolina General Assembly, and the Governor's Office established the myFutureNC Commission. After conducting a statewide conversation about economic competitiveness, workforce development, and educational attainment, the Commission set goals, and the initiative was later signed into law by Governor Roy Cooper.

The Land of Sky Educational Attainment and Workforce Collaborative, the "Collaborative," was established in mid-2019 as a pilot program to lead a four-county region toward fulfilling its portion of the state's overall [myFutureNC](#) goal of 2 million credentialed state residents by 2030.

The Collaborative assembled educational and business thought leaders, including representatives from public and private four-year universities, community colleges, K-12 public school systems, economic development coalitions, and businesses. These thought leaders met in November 2019 to begin the process of moving the Collaborative forward. In addition, a Steering Committee was developed to continue the work.

Building upon the research of the myFutureNC staff, the Collaborative began work in alignment with myFutureNC. You can read the full report by opening the [Call to Action for the state of North Carolina PDF](#).

To make significant gains in educational and workforce attainment efforts, it includes an equity lens in which diversity, inclusion, and accessibility to all resources must be a major component of each strategic goal. Establishing this baseline for each strategic goal is aligned with the [North Carolina Department of Public Instructions' Strategic Goal](#) of eliminating opportunity gaps by 2025.

Based on the research, the Collaborative identified the following areas in which the greatest project gains could be made:

- [Pre-K Enrollment Initiatives](#)
- CTE Career Pathways Initiatives
- Dual Enrollment Initiatives
- Work-based Learning Initiatives
- High School Graduation Initiatives
- College Retention and Completion Initiatives
- Educational and Workforce Competencies Alignment Initiatives

P-20 Council

In Fall 2021, the Land of Sky Educational Attainment & Workforce Collaborative's Steering Committee established the P-20 Council to move this collaborative work forward. Council goals include establishing policy recommendations and implementing initiatives across the pipeline from pre-k to gainful employment.



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2 million by 2030.

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Pre-School

Goals - We must strengthen pre-school educational programs. We endorse and align our goals with the four goals defined by the (2019) “WestEd” report that is part of the 1994 Leandro NC court case. We strongly support the first goal:

- Expand the NC pre-K program to make high-quality programs available to all eligible four-year-old children and enroll at least 75% in each county.

Strategy - To do this, we need to:

- Provide full funding for students in pre-K programs.
- Provide full-day programming for working parents to drop off children before work and pick them up after work.
- Provide full-year programming to serve the needs of working parents.
- Restructure teacher licensure to allow greater flexibility of teaching assignments.
- Establish a graduated/phased-in process for providers to become a licensed NC pre-K classroom.

Dashboard

To track North Carolina’s goal of reaching 2M employees with high-quality credentials or post-secondary degrees by 2030, [myFutureNC measures](#) the state’s progress. It helps determine if the state is on target in attaining its goal or adjustments are needed along the way.

By 2030, the goal is that 75% of eligible four-year-olds in each county will be enrolled in NC Pre-K in North Carolina. This goal is aligned with the [North Carolina Early Childhood Action Plan](#). Currently 37 out of 100 counties have met this enrollment goal.

Why does NC Pre-K Enrollment matter?

High-quality pre-K is a foundational year that can significantly improve student readiness for kindergarten and success in school. High quality pre-K programs, particularly NC Pre-K, provide both short- and long-term benefits to students and their communities.

Longitudinal research confirms that children who [participate in NC Pre-K](#):

- Enter kindergarten more ready to learn
- Are more proficient in both reading and math
- Are less likely to repeat grades throughout elementary school
- Are less likely to be placed in special education classes, resulting in savings to the state

This research further confirms that [these positive outcomes last through at least the 8th grade](#). Additional research shows long-term benefits include [higher graduation rates](#) from both high school and college, and [lower rates of both incarceration and teen births](#). High-quality pre-kindergarten programs also accrue [economic and social benefits](#) for communities.

More Info

For details about these academic readiness measures, including methodology and trends, visit the [myFutureNC Academic Readiness dashboard](#).

Land of Sky NC My Future NC 2030 – NC Pre-K Workgroup

Executive Summary

The Land of Sky NC Pre-K Workgroup was charged with addressing Strategic Direction #1 to enhance Pre-K and Early Childhood Education programs' enrollment. The associated Strategic Goal is to increase enrollment of eligible children to 75% in each county within Land of Sky. Although the workgroup identified multiple challenges to meeting the NC 2030 goal, top priorities for "moving the needle" align with the recent recommendations to address the Leandro findings. (NOTE: To meet the My Future NC 2030 goal, NC Pre-K enrollment in the Land of Sky Region will need to almost double from a baseline of 751 to a total enrollment of 1,492.)

Action: Expand the NC Pre-K program to make high-quality, full-year services available to all eligible four-year-old children and enroll at least 75 percent of eligible four-year-old children in each county.

Goal 1: At least 75% of eligible four-year-old children in each county are enrolled in a NC Pre-K program that operates for 10 or 12 months.

Goal 2: State funding provides the full cost per child to ensure the availability of NC Pre-K classrooms throughout the State.

Goal 3: NC Pre-K enrollees have access to before- and after- school care, if needed, and children who are enrolled in a 10-month program have access to a summer care and learning program, if needed.

Goal 4: NC Pre-K teachers hold an appropriate teaching license as specified by state policy and are paid according to the public school teacher salary schedule.

Goal 5: NC Pre-K enrollees are provided transportation to the program.

Funding Priorities

The Land of Sky NC Pre-K Committee recommendations align with the Leandro goals. To meet goal #1 above (which also matches My Future NC 2030), the Land of Sky Collaborative seeks funding to support goals #2 and #3 above as follows:

1. (Goal #2) Provide full funding (\$9,500 per student for ten months) for existing students in the four-county NC Pre-K programs (in comparison to 60% funding) and ensure that the administrative overhead is provided at 8% of the provider funding to support programs. For the current 751 (baseline) students in the four-county region it is estimated that an additional \$2,403,500 annually will be needed. To serve the estimated 1,492 students needed to meet the My Future NC 2030 goal, an additional \$7,602,600 will be required annually above the \$2,403,500 figure above.
2. (Goal #3) Provide full day programming, "wrap around" services, (nine hours rather than 6.5 per day) to serve the needs of working parents needing time to drop off children

before work and pick them up after work. It is estimated funding for implementation in the four-county region for current enrollment will be \$2,960,000 annually. To serve the estimated 1,492 students needed to meet the My Future NC 2030 goal, an additional \$5,881,000 will be required annually above the \$2,960,500 figure above.

3. (Goal #3) Provide full year programming (twelve rather than ten months) to serve the needs of working parents and to alleviate any potential loss of learning during the summer months prior to Kindergarten entry. It is estimated that funding for implementation in the four-county region for currently enrolled students will be approximately \$1,541,000 annually. To serve the estimated 1,492 students needed to meet the My Future NC 2030 goal, an additional \$3,061,000 will be required annually above the \$1,541,000 figure above.

Assumptions: The full funding cost was set at \$9,500 per child per ten months, similar to the public school rate for Pre-K. With full funding, existing programs will be better able (possibly expected/required) to increase teacher salaries that would better compete with the public school salary schedule (Goal #4). In addition, full funding would encourage existing programs to expand services and new providers to initiate NC Pre-K classrooms to provide the additional seats required to meet the 75% goal. All future funding will need to be adjusted for cost of living/inflation.

Policy Recommendations

1. Restructure teacher licensure from the current Birth to Kindergarten to Pre-K to Primary Grade 2 allowing greater flexibility of teaching assignments and more alignment of developmentally appropriate practice for this age group within the classrooms.
2. Establish a graduated/phased-in process for providers to become a licensed NC Pre-K classroom rather than requiring immediate compliance to receive funding to allow assistance to programs with start-up costs.
3. Increase the period in which existing programs may continue to receive full funding when qualified teachers leave a classroom or change the current provider payment structure so it is not based on the lead teacher educational qualifications, often resulting in changes in reimbursement payments throughout the year due to lead teacher turnover.
4. Develop a parallel licensing program for individuals to meet NC Pre-K requirements. Such a program may provide provisional licensure with individuals with an A.A./A.S./A.A.S. and experience with the requirement of continued studies toward a Bachelor's degree.
5. Develop a single portal of entry for all subsidized childcare in each county that would allow parents and guardians to understand and navigate their options and eligibility, thus potentially increasing overall enrollment in subsidized childcare programs. Simplify the application process

Policy/Funding – Promise Program

Develop a Promise Program/Loan Forgiveness Program for individuals pursuing an AA/AS/AAS degree in the field that also covers enrollment and completion of the Bachelor's degree. Allow early childhood majors to be eligible for the Teaching Fellows program.

Local Projects

1. Hire a Pathways Partner to provide mentoring support for interested individuals pursuing a career in early childhood education.
2. Each county be asked to create a taskforce to look at and recommend transportation options for families participating in NC Pre-K.

Final Note

The workgroup's efforts and recommendations focused on addressing enrollment in NC Pre-K programs per My Future NC 2030 goals. **However, the group strongly encourages the state of North Carolina to implement policies and funding to establish affordable access to quality early childhood education (4-star and 5-star programs) for all families. It is recommended that North Carolina consider adjusting the NC 2030 goal to include enrollment in 4-star and 5-star programs.**

NC Pre-K Workgroup Research and Findings

Participants

An invitation to participate in the NC Pre-K Workgroup was distributed across the four counties to leaders in early childhood education. The membership of the workgroup included:

Name	Title	Organization
Allen, Carrie	Western Region Early Learning Consultant	NCDPI-OEL
Arnold, Mary	Program Operations Manager	Children, Family & Community Partnerships Department Community Action Opportunities
Atwaters, Natasha	Executive Director	Children First
Bailey, Stacey	NC Pre-K Program Director	Buncombe Partnership for Children
Blackburn, Brenda	Dean of Business & Service Careers	Blue Ridge CC
Bowles, Lynn	Executive Director	Madison County Smart Start
Combs, Shelah	Early Childhood Education Lead Instructor	Blue Ridge CC
Davis, Maura	Professor of Early Childhood Education and Liaison to Verner Center for Early Learning	Warren Wilson College
Keiser, Megan	Childhood Education Coordinator	Brevard College
Lemel, Page	Community Advocate	Transylvania County
Loflin, Gene	Associate Vice President	A-B Tech
Repass, Brian	Director	Children, Family & Community Partnerships Department Community Action Opportunities
Reynolds, Tamara	Instructor, Education	A-B Tech
Siefert, Kimberly	Family Services Manager	WCCA
Snurr, Rebecca	Program Support Specialist	Smart Start of Transylvania County

Data on NC Pre-K Enrollment Numbers

Initial data and goals provided by the County Profiles included:

County	Current Enrollment Rate	Students Needed to Meet 75% Goal
Buncombe	35%	473

Henderson	35%	213
Madison	42%	37
Transylvania	64%	18

Using the data provided by the profiles, the Workgroup calculated numbers to be served to meet the NC 2030 goal (This data was used in computing the costs of recommendations.).

County	Baseline Served	Baseline Percentage	Additional Needed to Meet 75% Goal	Total to Meet 75% Goal
Buncombe	414	35%	473	887
Henderson	186	35%	213	399
Madison	47	42%	37	84
Transylvania	104	64%	18	122
Total	751		741	1492

(NOTE: The My Future NC 2030 goal almost double enrollment in NC Pre-K in the four-county region from 751 to 1,492.)

Foundational Issues

NC Pre-K was originally developed to increase a child's preparedness for school. It represented a morphing of the More at Four Program. Although the charge was to specifically address NC Pre-K, the workgroup agreed that it is not possible to view NC Pre-K in isolation. The importance of the first 5 years in a child's development was captured as part of the indicators referenced in our strategy. We recognize the need for more childcare slots from birth to NC Pre-K. Additionally, these increased slots must be financially feasible for families.

Affordable childcare has a direct impact on the productivity of our workforce.

Pregnancy care management initiatives, parenting outreach programs and voluntary home visiting programs are important investments in having healthy, prepared children to enter NC Pre-K programs. ***However, we also recognize that NC Pre-K programs are able to make up for a lot of the deficits that may present in a child, and this success makes a positive impact on kindergarten readiness.***

One of the most recognized studies on the benefits of high quality early childhood education comes from North Carolina. [The Abecedarian Project](#), from the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center at the University of North Carolina, offers definitive data on the impact of a high quality early education programs for young children. ***Current research continues to emphasize the need for high quality, intensive adult-child relationships in our early education programs.*** As with K-12 education, teachers are paramount to the success of any early childhood program.

Meeting the requirements for a NC Pre-K classroom is daunting. Not only are the physical and programmatic requirements challenging, but finding qualified instructors is perhaps the biggest hurdle. Licensure is a complicated process requiring tremendous personal commitment. The resulting job has a low salary and most often no benefits. **Teacher retention is difficult, and replacing these teachers is even more difficult.** There is minimal return on the personal investment made to become a licensed NC Pre-K teacher. For individual teachers, the option to join a NC Pre-K classroom in a public school setting is more attractive as the position comes with better salary and benefits.

During the pandemic, the availability of childcare became challenging due to school closures. The state offered a temporary solution allowing Community Based Organizations (CBO) to enter into Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) with Local Education Agencies (LEA) to provide childcare so that the school system was the overarching entity assuring proper operation of the CBO. In this particular instance we may be able to utilize a system of Memorandums of Understanding or contracts with LEAs to provide licensed teachers who have access to higher salaries and benefits through the LEAs.

The current Birth to Kindergarten (BK) license limits public schools. Once hired by a school, the BK teacher may only work in the NC Pre-K classroom or a kindergarten classroom. **Reconfiguring the license to a Birth to 2nd grade or a preschool to primary school license would be far more attractive to elementary school principals giving them the flexibility to move these licensed teachers between grades as enrollment numbers shift.**

The current needs for NC Pre-K expansion cannot be answered solely by our public schools. Many schools are operating at full capacity and dedicating a classroom to NC Pre-K is not feasible without building new space. **Thus, it is beneficial to continue to support both private and public NC Pre-K options.**

In discussions, the workgroup estimated a cost of \$88,000 per new NC Pre-K classroom. This includes the physical needs of furniture, equipment and curriculum estimated at \$25,000. A licensed lead teacher would require a minimum salary of \$35,000 (again, without any employee benefits) and an assistant teacher at a minimum of \$28,000. If each classroom contains 16 NC Pre-K enrollees, Buncombe County alone would require an investment of \$2.64 million to meet the 2030 goal and open 30 new preschool classrooms. However, we all feel that finding the 30 lead teachers would be the biggest challenge. **Added flexibility in teacher education and licensure is necessary to address the tremendous shortage in licensed NC Pre-K teachers.**

Additionally, licensure for facilities presents its own set of challenges. It is burdensome. All counties have seen a decline of licensed child care programs while at the same time seeing new, unlicensed programs begin. Those centered on Montessori and experiential learning in the out of doors have gained a considerable presence. Work schedules and family needs

dictate preferences in childcare. ***A variety of different programs is needed, and developing a method for evaluating the quality of all of the options is desirable.***

Provider Expansion Challenges Versus Teacher Recruitment/Retention Challenges

From our initial meeting on October 19, 2020, it became clear that issues surrounding increasing enrollment of eligible children in NC Pre-K fell into 2 major areas, one involving the operational challenges to expansion of NC Pre-K programs and the other involving the issue of qualified educators (possibly the greatest challenge). Thus, we divided ourselves into two subgroups: NC Pre-K Provider and NC Pre-K Workforce. The NC Pre-K Workgroup met once per month and our two subgroups met in the intervening weeks.

Provider Expansion Challenges Work Group

Name	Title	Organization
Bowles, Lynn	Executive Director	Madison County Smart Start
Lemel, Page	Community Advocate	Transylvania County
Repass, Brian	Director	Children, Family & Community Partnerships Department Community Action Opportunities
Siefert, Kimberly	Family Services Manager	WCCA
Snurr, Rebecca	Program Support Specialist	Smart Start of Transylvania County

This subgroup addressed the programmatic and physical needs to provide additional NC Pre-K slots. Considerations included both public and private options.

We find great disparity in determining what constitutes “quality” childcare facilities. The star system is clear for licensed facilities. ***However, there are many highly regarded unlicensed providers in each of our counties that provide attractive childcare options for parents.*** The NC Pre-K classrooms in public schools are evaluated through the lens of the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). Thus, the state cannot directly compare the NC Pre-K classroom in a licensed center under the authority of the Department of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) with the NC Pre-K classroom in a public school setting.

We see great value in aligning multiple agencies for the single purpose of seeing children enter school prepared to learn. The existing separation between early childhood entities continues to cause challenges to efficiency and effectiveness for our children. Most of the Land of Sky

counties have an existing collaboration around early childhood, but these organizations are not childcare specific. Buncombe County has the Buncombe Partnership for Children, the agency responsible for implementing the NC Pre-K program and for providing Child Care Resources. Additionally there is Community Action Opportunities serving Head Start Children, while the Verner Center for Early Learning holds the Early Head Start grant. Henderson County has the Children and Family Resource Center, Smart Start and Western Carolina Community Action (WCCA). WCCA provides their Early Head Start, Head Start and NC Pre-K. Madison County has the Community Action Opportunities organization providing their Head Start and NC Pre-K program. Madison County Smart Start provides Child Care Resources to providers. Transylvania County has GetSet Transylvania as its overarching early childhood collaborative and Smart Start administers the NC Pre-K program with providers representing all licensed child care types to provide families with diverse choices: Head Start through WCCA, public school and private facilities.

The complexities of the application process for our early education programs can be daunting for families with limited experience, education and access to technology. As more grandparents become involved in providing direct care, they may not have the ability to complete forms online. This may impede registrations and potential subsidy assistance. Individual family situations may also contribute to application challenges. The grandparents may be the primary caregivers, but that arrangement has never been legally formalized. This limits their ability to make commitments on behalf of the child. The requirements for establishing income eligibility with pay stubs can cause some parents great frustrations, particularly those who work multiple jobs or who change jobs frequently.

Early Head Start, Head start, Child Care Subsidy and NC Pre-K operate with different eligibility requirements, different goals and different developmental expectations (see table below).

Program Eligibility Requirements

Program	Income Requirement
Early Head Start, Head Start	100% of Federal Poverty levels
NC Pre-K	75% of the Median Income in NC
Child Care Subsidy up to age 5	200% of Federal Poverty levels
Child Care Subsidy after age 5	133% of Federal Poverty levels

The county level administrators for these individual programs often do not have a full understanding of the other programs thus limiting their ability to assist parents throughout the early childhood period. If our local program administrators are not able to fully understand all of the early childhood program offerings and requirements, how can we possibly expect our parents to understand their options? ***Having a single person to act as a “childcare***

conciierge” in each county would be beneficial. In addition, we recommend gathering all involved in early childhood at a minimum of once per year to share information and to strategize on funding streams.

These meetings could also serve as an opportunity to maximize the use of existing potential touch points for educating parents on the early childhood educational opportunities for their children. We recognize that our individual Departments of Social Services can play a lead role in identifying eligible NC Pre-K children through their work with food and nutrition programs. Providing education and information to faith communities, nonprofits who work with the vulnerable, and doctors’ offices would be additional pathways to advertise the availability of NC Pre-K opportunities along with other early intervention programs.

NC Pre-K hours align with public school hours. Parents working a standard workday need to have extended hours of care which are referred to as “wrap around services.” Many afterschool programs accommodate only school age children and are not willing to accept 4 year olds. These extended hours come with a cost that may be covered by child care subsidy dollars. However, many who qualify for NC Pre-K do not qualify for child care subsidy. Additionally, in order to qualify for childcare subsidy you must be employed. Is our goal to provide a high quality, early education for all children or only a specific socio-economic group? ***We recommend aligning NC Pre-K hours with workday hours and to allow for access year-round.***

The State of North Carolina has made available funding for NC Pre-K expansion. The current method of providing this expansion funding has caused counties to decline the funding or to find themselves in a position of having to return expansion dollars to the state. ***We recommend the development of specific criteria to be eligible for receipt of expansion dollars.*** The county should have to demonstrate its level of preparedness for new classrooms with eligible children prior to receiving funding. We can put further shape to the specific criteria as we continue our work if this is the pleasure of Land of Sky.

We also support a phased process of achieving licensure as an NC Pre-K classroom. When More at Four, the precursor to NC Pre-K, began, there was an extended time for a program to achieve full compliance. The same needs to be considered for NC Pre-K program development and expansion. We recognize that the requirements can be costly, and many providers may not have immediate access to the full amount of capital needed. By offering a phased approach, the capital could be invested over a series of years making cash flow more manageable for individual providers. Having a low or no-interest loan fund specifically for Pre-K expansion may make the process more affordable for providers. A grace period needs to be developed for teacher recruitment when the existing licensed teacher leaves for another job without decreasing the reimbursement rates. The current policy of a reduced secondary reimbursement rate further constrains the program’s ability to continue as a NC Pre-K classroom.

More at Four also provided for local reimbursements instead of at the state level. The NC Pre-K contract administrator had this authority. ***We recommend a return to local reimbursements.*** This would allow for more timely responses to adjustments in programs. ***We also recommend an increase in the amount allowed for administrative costs from the current 4% to 10% (Or at least to solidify an 8% rate rather than providing annual expansion funding).*** This was the original administrative cost level allowed in the More at Four program. Requirements for program monitoring are always increasing and demanding more time from the administrators.

Each of the counties within Land of Sky rely on their Community Health Assessments to identify vulnerable populations of children. Additionally, an overlay of available childcare programs and workplace nodes are used to inform new locations for childcare programs. Transportation for our early education program participants is a constant need in rural areas. It is our opinion that the vulnerable families we most seek to engage in our early education programs are those who are most challenged to develop consistent relationships with educational programs and other means of social and emotional support for themselves and their children.

We feel our four counties in Land of Sky share a reluctance on the part of parents to have their needs known across agencies. Thus, it is not a natural fit to have our local partnerships for children leading this effort. We would encourage the eligibility data to be generated by our DSS child care subsidy specialists because of their ongoing relationship with families who would most probably qualify for NC Pre-K. This would then allow us an opportunity to more fully understand the barriers to participation on a case by case basis.

Funding remains central to our considerations. We understand the requirement of the annual Market Rate Survey to meet the requirements of the federal Child Care Development Block Grant. However, we question the impact of this survey on our childcare providers and our families. In their report on financing child care in North Carolina of July 2020, authors Alexandra F. Sirota, Greg Borom and Patrick McHugh explain how market rates are established in each North Carolina county and the related complexity to that number. For a full understanding, please read pages 4 and 5 of [***Equitably Financing Child Care in Every North Carolina County***](#). The state does not use the market rate when considering subsidy rates, and subsidy increases do not happen often. We are also aware of how broken the economic tier designations are in North Carolina. Using the county's economic tier status to determine subsidy amounts is also a questionable method. However, the licensed centers must charge the increased market rates to private pay parents in order to continue receiving subsidy. You can access the most recent information on individual counties in the [***2018 Child Care Subsidy Market Rate***](#). The authors do advocate for a standard state reimbursement rate. This would require an increased commitment from the state of over \$90 million per year.

NC Pre-K Teacher Recruitment/Retention Challenges

Name	Title	Organization
Allen, Carrie	Western Region Early Learning Coordinator	NCDPI - OEL
Arnold, Mary	Program Operations Manager	Children, Family & Community Partnerships Department Community Action Opportunities
Atwaters, Natasha	Executive Director	Children First
Bailey, Stacey	NC Pre-K Program Director	Buncombe Partnership for Children
Blackburn, Brenda	Dean of Business & Service Careers	Blue Ridge Community College
Combs, Shelah	Early Childhood Education Lead Instructor	Blue Ridge Community College
Davis, Maura	Professor of Early Childhood Education and Liaison to Verner Center for Early Learning	Warren Wilson College
Keiser, Megan	Childhood Education Coordinator	Brevard College
Reynolds, Tamara	Instructor, Education	A-B Tech

The Workforce subgroup has identified barriers to expansion of NC Pre-K related to obtaining the required Birth-Kindergarten (BK) license and which private child care provider rates are currently based upon.

As established, finding qualified teachers is the largest barrier to the expansion of the NC Pre-K program. ***Establish a provisional licensure plan to allow current early childhood educators to transition to the role of LEAD teacher, if they have at minimum an Associate's Degree, five years of classroom experience, and maintain enrollment in an early childhood education Bachelor's program.***

The cost of pursuing a degree in Early Childhood Education is prohibitive for many prospective teachers. ***Establish a Promise/Forgiveness Program for teachers pursuing associates and bachelor's, as well as teacher licensure within the North Carolina Community College and University Systems.*** The Teaching Fellows Program is explained in more detail below.

Expecting providers to offer classrooms which meet NC Pre-K requirements before providing funding limits many providers. Capital to meet requirements is an issue for many. ***Offer a provisional status for new classrooms participating in NC Pre-K and provide sufficient funding for two years while these programs work to meet program requirements that are not based on the lead teacher educational qualifications.*** This provides the time for

programs to ramp up in meeting all the requirements while receiving adequate funding to cover the cost of care for the NC Pre-K program.

High turnover in private settings causes financial implications for providers. Penalizing these providers when a qualified lead teacher leaves causes a reduction in reimbursements and makes it difficult to continue operations. ***Allow provisional status of programs losing a qualified lead teacher providing funding for the provisional period while the program recruits another qualified teacher.***

Onboarding supports are needed for NC Pre-K classrooms to be successful. ***Create a pilot program to provide a Pathways Partner, or mentor coach, to lead a cohort of early childhood educators who are interested in advancing their education credentials.***

Community partners in this process could include students in Career and Technical Education classes at the high school level, through local community colleges, and regional colleges or universities offering a variety of levels of credentialing. Though some agencies provide informal guidance on how to access education, there is not presently a specific outreach position that works directly with individuals to identify their interest in returning to school, and to support teachers in creating a viable education plan that supports their completion of their degree, be it an Associate's, Bachelor's, or B-K licensure. The Pathways Partner would identify interest, support the teacher in identifying viable educational opportunities and support them in making an application, enrolling, and beginning coursework, including the preparation for required professional examinations (e.g. Praxis). This Pathways Partner would also help students access specific scholarship opportunities to finance their education. In addition, the Pathways Partner would also offer a range of support to help identify the most appropriate educational pathway, offer the necessary academic support, technology support, resiliency-informed approach with weekly coaching/mentoring, and identify potential barriers impacting success in their education. The Pathways Partner will broaden outreach to connect degree-seeking early childhood employees to their local options for growing their professional credentials and overcoming barriers.

The Teaching Fellows Program as a Model

The North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program is a competitive, merit-based forgivable loans for service program that provides up to \$4,125 a semester (\$8,250 a year) for up to four years to highly-qualified students committed to teaching special education or a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering or Mathematics) field in a North Carolina public school.

Per [G.S.116-209.62](#), the purpose of the North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program is to recruit, prepare, and support students residing in or attending institutions of higher education located in North Carolina to become highly effective STEM or special education teachers in the State's public schools.

The goals of the North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program are:

- To strengthen teacher recruitment in North Carolina by providing a pathway to teaching that is open to a diverse pool of applicants: high school students, college and college transfer students, and individuals who already have a bachelor's degree and wish to pursue coursework for teacher licensure.
- To provide excellent preparation by partnering with five of the premier educator preparation programs in the state.
- To provide unique enrichment opportunities and experiences that focus on developing the leadership potential of Teaching Fellows and instill a greater sense of purpose, service, and professionalism.
- To recruit and retain greater numbers of highly qualified teachers in special education and STEM fields and to create a robust pipeline for providing highly qualified teachers to low-performing schools.

Call for Action

Although the challenges are many, we are confident that our recommendations contain achievable goals. Working together across Land of Sky, we feel able to influence policy and funding changes that would allow us to increase our NC Pre-K enrollment. Many of our recommendations include a need for flexibility not available in the current NC Pre-K requirements. The policy changes would have to go hand in hand with increased funding in order to reach the stated goal of 75% of eligible children enrolled in NC Pre-K. (NOTE: To meet the My Future NC 2030 goal, NC Pre-K enrollment in the Land of Sky Region will need to almost double from a baseline of 751 to a total enrollment of 1,492.) We look forward to continuing to participate in this conversation.

It must be noted that the group strongly encourages the state of North Carolina to implement policies and funding to establish affordable access to quality early childhood education (4-state and 5-star programs) for all families. It is recommended that North Carolina consider adjusting the NC 2030 goal to include enrollment in 4-star and 5-star programs.

Funding

1. Provide full funding (\$9,500 per student for ten months) for existing students in the four-county NC Pre-K programs (in comparison to 60% funding) and ensure that the administrative overhead is provided at 8% of the provider funding to support programs.
2. Provide full day programming, “wrap around” services, (nine hours rather than 6.5 per day) to serve the needs of working parents needing time to drop off children before work and pick them up after work
3. Provide full year programming (twelve rather than ten months) to serve the needs of working parents and to alleviate any potential loss of learning during the summer months prior to Kindergarten entry.

Policy Recommendations

1. Restructure teacher licensure from the current Birth to Kindergarten to Pre-K to Primary Grade 2 allowing greater flexibility of teaching assignments and more alignment of developmentally appropriate practice for this age group within the classrooms.
2. Establish a graduated/phased-in process for providers to become a licensed NC Pre-K classroom rather than requiring immediate compliance to receive funding to allow assistance to programs with start-up costs.
3. Increase the period in which existing programs may continue to receive full funding when qualified teachers leave a classroom or change the current provider payment structure so it is not based on the lead teacher educational qualifications, often resulting in changes in reimbursement payments throughout the year due to lead teacher turnover.
4. Develop a parallel licensing program for individuals to meet NC Pre-K requirements. Such a program may provide provisional licensure with individuals with an

A.A./A.S./A.A.S. and experience with the requirement of continued studies toward a Bachelor's degree.

5. Develop a single portal of entry for all subsidized childcare in each county that would allow parents and guardians to understand and navigate their options and eligibility, thus potentially increasing overall enrollment in subsidized childcare programs.

Policy/Funding – Promise Program

Develop a Promise Program/Loan Forgiveness Program for individuals pursuing an AA/AS/AAS degree in the field that also covers enrollment and completion of the Bachelor's degree. Allow early childhood majors to be eligible for the Teaching Fellows program.

Local Projects

1. Hire a Pathways Partner to provide mentoring support for interested individuals pursuing a career in early childhood education.
2. Each county be asked to create a taskforce to look at and recommend transportation options for families participating in NC Pre-K.

Tables Representing Cost Calculations

Table 1 – Estimated Cost to Fully Fund NC Pre-K in Land of Sky with Current Enrollments

County	Baseline Served	Baseline Budget (Direct Provider)	Projected Full Funding for Baseline - \$9500	Additional Needed for Full funding Baseline - \$9500	Baseline Overhead (4%)	Projected Overhead (8%)	Additional Overhead Needed	Total Additional Needed
Buncombe	414	\$ 2,294,268.00	\$ 3,933,000.00	\$ 1,638,732.00	\$ 91,770.72	\$ 183,541.44	\$ 91,770.72	\$ 1,730,502.72
Henderson	186	\$ 1,469,802.00	\$ 1,767,000.00	\$ 297,198.00	\$ 58,792.08	\$ 117,584.16	\$ 58,792.08	\$ 355,990.08
Madison	47	\$ 223,344.00	\$ 446,500.00	\$ 223,156.00	\$ 8,933.76	\$ 17,867.52	\$ 8,933.76	\$ 232,089.76
Transylvania	104	\$ 940,729.00	\$ 988,000.00	\$ 47,271.00	\$ 37,629.16	\$ 75,258.32	\$ 37,629.16	\$ 84,900.16
Total	751	\$ 4,928,143.00	\$ 7,134,500.00	\$ 2,206,357.00	\$197,125.72	\$ 394,251.44	\$ 197,125.72	\$ 2,403,482.72

Table 2 – Estimated Cost to Fully Fund NC Pre-K for NC 2030 Goal Enrollments – Adjust for Inflation

County	Projected NC 2030 Additional served	Projected total served	Projected Full Funding for Projected total - \$9500	Additional Needed for Full funding Projected total - \$9500	Projected Additional 8% Overhead	Total Additional Needed
Buncombe	473	887	\$ 8,426,500.00	\$ 4,493,500.00	\$ 359,480.00	\$ 4,852,980.00
Henderson	213	399	\$ 3,790,500.00	\$ 2,023,500.00	\$ 161,880.00	\$ 2,185,380.00
Madison	37	84	\$ 798,000.00	\$ 351,500.00	\$ 28,120.00	\$ 379,620.00
Transylvania	18	122	\$ 1,159,000.00	\$ 171,000.00	\$ 13,680.00	\$ 184,680.00
		1492	\$ 14,174,000.00	\$ 7,039,500.00	\$ 563,160.00	\$ 7,602,660.00

Table 3 – Estimated Cost for Land of Sky Wrap-Around Services For Current Enrollment

County	Baseline Served	Added Cost Per Child for 10 months	Projected Additional Cost	Total Cost
Buncombe	414	\$ 3,650.00	\$ 1,511,100.00	
Henderson	186	\$ 3,650.00	\$ 678,900.00	
Madison	47	\$ 3,650.00	\$ 171,550.00	
Transylvania	104	\$ 3,650.00	\$ 379,600.00	\$ 2,741,150.00
			With 8% Admin	\$ 2,960,442.00

Table 4 – Estimated Cost for Land of Sky Wrap-Around Services for 2030 Target Population – Adjust for Inflation

County	Baseline Served	Added Cost Per Child for 10 months	Projected Additional Cost	
Buncombe	887	\$ 3,650.00	\$ 3,237,550.00	
Henderson	399	\$ 3,650.00	\$ 1,456,350.00	
Madison	84	\$ 3,650.00	\$ 306,600.00	
Transylvania	122	\$ 3,650.00	\$ 445,300.00	\$ 5,445,800.00
			With 8% Admin	\$ 5,881,464.00

Table 5 – Estimated Cost for Twelve-Month Services for Current Land of Sky Enrollments

County	Baseline Served	Added Cost Per Child for 2 months)	Projected Additional Cost	
Buncombe	414	\$ 1,900.00	\$ 786,600.00	
Henderson	186	\$ 1,900.00	\$ 353,400.00	
Madison	47	\$ 1,900.00	\$ 89,300.00	
Transylvania	104	\$ 1,900.00	\$ 197,600.00	\$ 1,426,900.00
			With 8% Admin	\$ 1,541,052.00

Table 6 – Estimated Cost for Twelve-Month Services for Land of Sky 2030 Population – Adjust for Inflation

County	Baseline Served	Added Cost Per Child for 2 months)	Projected Additional Cost	
Buncombe	887	\$ 1,900.00	\$ 1,685,300.00	
Henderson	399	\$ 1,900.00	\$ 758,100.00	
Madison	84	\$ 1,900.00	\$ 159,600.00	
Transylvania	122	\$ 1,900.00	\$ 231,800.00	\$ 2,834,800.00
			With 8% Admin	\$ 3,061,584.00