

Organization: Asheville City Schools

Project: Expanding High-Quality Early Childhood Education within Asheville City Schools and Local Communities

1. How is COVID impacting your project plans? Is the project proposal contingent on a full reopening to pre-COVID levels?

As COVID cases have decreased in our community and more people are starting to go back to work, the ACS Preschool waitlist for the current school year has grown. Currently, our Preschool classrooms are at reduced capacity due to COVID, but remain at full capacity of 12. We currently have a waitlist that continues to grow. In August 2021, we are planning to return to pre-COVID levels with 18 children per Preschool classroom.

2. Is this request for almost \$1M for moving and maintenance of 4 classrooms and an additional 18 slots?

This request is to assist with the moving and maintenance of 4 classrooms into public housing communities. Within these communities, our goal is to offer full day, full year care at little to no cost to families. The additional 18 scholarship slots will be spread across Preschool classrooms within the school district to allow families more access to Pk across the district including the Montesorri PK/K classrooms.

3. Is the primary new gain 18 slots, one classroom?

Yes, the primary gain is 19 slots and one classroom. Depending on our community site placements, we may be able to open an 11<sup>th</sup> classroom. This is uncertain at this time and will be determined once community sites are finalized.

4. Have spaces for these centers been identified already? Are they good to go? Are the classrooms at Housing Authority locations (Pisgah View, Hillcrest, Southside (Burton) and Maple Crest) currently vacant, or will other services/slots be displaced?

The Asheville Housing Authority has committed to assigning ACS a Preschool classroom in Maple Crest, which will be a new classroom within a new community. The locations of the other 3-4 classrooms are still being determined. There is a possibility that some Head Start/Early Head Start classrooms may be displaced. Families are stressing the need for full day, full year care within the housing communities. With our classrooms in the community housing developments we will be providing full day full year care (7:30-5:30).

5. Where will the funds come from to upgrade the 4 new classrooms at AHA sites?

The funds to upgrade the new classrooms will come from this grant. There is not a need for supplies, materials, and furniture.

6. What do you define “PK” to mean?

In our PK program, we serve children ages 3-5 year olds in heterogeneous groupings. Our goal is to keep children with their teachers for the 2 years they are in our program in order to provide them with continuity of care to help build a strong foundation. Currently, we serve children through various income sources such as Head Start, NCPK, Exceptional Children’s, Child Care Subsidy, Scholarship, and Tuition.

7. In the Results section, you cite in the same sentence both the large ACS achievement gap and research by others on the efficacy of 3 and 4 year olds attending preschool as a way for these children to do well throughout the rest of their schooling. You went on to say your “goal is to provide all children with a strong foundation in order to build success in school and life.” The ACS have operated child care/early childhood programs for many years, but in reality they do not seem to be having the result promoted here. If funded, how will the Results from this grant be different and actually impact the achievement gap through early childhood education?

While the current and past focus of instruction for Pre-K students is fostering developmental growth, ACS leaders plan to add a component that specifically includes attention to and measurement of literacy growth. Asheville City’s very strong preschool and kindergarten programs are planning to provide a solid literacy foundation, one aligned with the NC State Board of Education’s Collaborative Guiding Framework for Early Literacy Education. At the state level there is a current move to require PreK-3rd grade teachers to have professional development around the Science of Reading. The ACS Curriculum & Instruction Department supports this work by further developing both a common language and shared expectations between Pre-K and Kindergarten. The goal is to ensure a kindergarten readiness factor we have not seen in the past and close the achievement gap we see when students enter the primary grades.

We are convinced that additional literacy engagement both in and out of school will result in more fully developed foundational literacy skills (print concepts, phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, fluency, comprehension) for our children of color and other children with literacy skill delays. Our staff recognize the need to consider additional materials, professional growth, and more focused parent engagement around early literacy. And as we increase the expertise of both teachers and parents we will increase opportunities for students to become successful independent readers and writers.

8. What is the racial/ethnic breakdown of your preschool/ECE staff? Please explain the ratio of demographics as it relates to the students.

We have 14% staff of color employed within our program. Currently, this school year, our demographics include 29% children of color.

9. What kind of racial equity training does your staff receive?

Our staff participate in racial equity training through Asheville City Schools. This school year, we have been focusing on Anti-Racist and Anti-Bias Education (ABAR). These sessions have been led monthly by Britt Hawthorne and include office hours where teachers can work with her one-

on-one. In addition to this work, Mrs. Hawthorne has worked with our teachers to develop classroom libraries with an ABAR lens.

Preschool staff have begun to attend the Racial Equity Institute. As slots are available more staff will receive this training.

10. What level of funding is ACS proposing to invest in preschool from local allocation dollars in FY2022? (via county funds or local City supplemental tax) Is this \$920,000 intended to fully or partially supplant funds previously covered through the City's local education allocation?

With added classrooms and facility needs in the community, we need the true grant funding for the program or will need to look at at least a 20% cut in budget for next year's ECE budget if we have to continue to use regular local revenue allocated from Buncombe County.

11. What amount would be your minimum required under a partial funding scenario?

We need the true grant funding for the program or will need to look at at least a 20% cut in budget for next year's ECE budget if we have to continue to use regular local revenue allocated from Buncombe County. If we have to cut our budget, then we will have to decrease the number of classrooms and slots.

We are unique due to the being part of a DPI program. Therefore, our staff are paid at the state rate along with K-12 staff. Staff also receive benefits including paid leave days and health benefits.

12. If we fund the project this year, how do you plan on finding funding for this next year if it's a successful project?

In our proposal, we have asked for multi-year funding.

RESPONSES ARE DUE TO [ANGELYN.JOHNSON@BUNCOMBECOUNTY.ORG](mailto:ANGELYN.JOHNSON@BUNCOMBECOUNTY.ORG) BY 12:00 PM ON FRIDAY, 3/12/2021