

FY2021 ECE Grantee Site Visits

Grantee: **Asheville City Schools**

What information would you like to share with other committee members who were not able to attend this site visit?

Asheville City Schools (ACS) Preschool is currently operating 9 classrooms (down from 11) with a reduced capacity of 12 children from 18. They also shortened hours of operation at the Asheville Primary campus by 1.5 hours. Staff turnover has increased. There are 16 students who are remote learners. Staff check in with remote students 2 times/day; there are activities available online and take home kits; and at least once a week the teacher visits with the family. ACS also has a contract to conduct play and learn groups for 57 infants and toddlers and 69 preschoolers.

In typical times there are a little over 200 students in 11 classrooms with 18 students in each classrooms. At this time with approximately 110 students, there are only 2 staff who are of color with the remainder being white. Of those students, about one-third are students of color. As one of the ACS presenters noted, from early in the child's educational life, it is best that a student interacts with staff who are racially diverse. As is well-known in the EC field, it is difficult to recruit and retain staff, especially those who are diverse.

We discussed with Ms. Bowman the reason behind the comparably large appropriation received by the ACS (\$861,000).

What feedback do you have for the grantee?

Kudos for the large extra effort to deliver your services virtually—not easy with small children!

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Grantee: **Asheville City Schools**

What information would you like to share with other committee members who were not able to attend this site visit?

The center director, Susanna Smith, was extremely impressive. She has been with the center for 20 years, and she knows exactly how to keep the center going during COVID, how to make the necessary adjustments, how to keep her eye always on the highest needs of the children. I was also impressed with their model of trying to have centers in the different elementary schools, through partnerships, and their outreach to parents and families, beyond the standard curriculum offerings. The model of having these centers in elementary schools makes so much sense that I hope we can do more of that--but the problem is that the schools themselves lack the physical space or lack the ability to transport kids. The credentials of the teachers and assistants at this center are right on target. They do need more teachers of color, but they are aware of that and have had trouble recruiting.

What feedback do you have for the grantee?

Excellent presentation. I would have liked to see more actual pictures inside the classrooms--maybe next time! Thank you for taking so much time with us.

FY2021 ECE Grantee Site Visits

Grantee: **Asheville Jewish Community Center**

What information would you like to share with other committee members who were not able to attend this site visit?

Asheville Jewish Community Center has done an excellent job in building a strong, open, and resilient community, which stays true to its culture and beliefs. This foundational strength is vital to the thriving success of the children they serve and their families. They have implemented a thoughtful wholistic construct with their Learning Community Support Specialist position, which is an answer to the workforce development crisis. The idea to undergird the tirelessly work already being implemented fosters longevity in the function of their system. Also, it was refreshing to know that they are not a siloed organization, and they are open to educate; or as it was spoken, to journey with an individual that is open to learn new perspectives and teaching styles when addressing the needs of our children.

What feedback do you have for the grantee?

Please continue on your path of great work, and thank you for your thorough presentation today.

FY2021 ECE Grantee Site Visits

Grantee: **Buncombe County Partnership for Children**

What information would you like to share with other committee members who were not able to attend this site visit?

It was an informative session. The conversation about social-emotional learning and if children will be "school ready" once the pandemic ends.

What feedback do you have for the grantee?

They did a great job of presenting the information- very informative.

FY2021 ECE Grantee Site Visits

Grantee: **Buncombe County Partnership for Children**

What information would you like to share with other committee members who were not able to attend this site visit?

Our investment in helping childcare businesses strengthen the business side of their operations is not easy, but necessary. Dealing with COVID has distracted business people from learning higher order skills on the business side. We will need to persist with this in order to see the full potential of the program.

What feedback do you have for the grantee?

I like that you're partnering with other organizations with expertise in business to help childcare businesses. I wonder if breaking the pieces of information in the business leadership and automation portion into smaller bites would make it easier to engage other providers? And getting individualized support and mentorship for the two currently involved, in an effort to develop testimonials from them that can be used in marketing the program to others?

FY2021 ECE Grantee Site Visits

Grantee: **Buncombe County Schools/Verner**

What information would you like to share with other committee members who were not able to attend this site visit?

Project over budget by \$750,000 and they are seeking additional, no-cost funding from WNC Bridge Foundation and Dogwood.

What feedback do you have for the grantee?

I'm unsure at this time. It would great to debrief with the Committee and get additional perspectives.

FY2021 ECE Grantee Site Visits

Grantee: **Buncombe County Schools/Verner**

What information would you like to share with other committee members who were not able to attend this site visit?

The current status of the project, both the successes and the current major challenges they are facing to put all the Remaining critical pieces together, paving, building cost, and financing. The gap in funding is \$1.2M, a significant amount and about 30% of the total costs, if my math and assumptions are correct. (As noted in the Bridge Fdn. Overview). This project is the Committee's largest investment recommended to the Commissioners and accepted by them. While we all know surprises and cost increases arise in construction projects, a 30% gap in key elements is significant and instructional. The full committee should know the efforts that Verner is making to close the gap. I commend Marcia, the Boards, and other staff in their efforts to mitigate and overcome this situation. The committee should know about the high number of infant/toddler classrooms and expected net increase of slots.
I would like to know more about the lab school for CTE students mentioned.

What feedback do you have for the grantee?

Why are the proposed Building interest rates so high? Is there another financing source/strategy beside Mobile Modular and possibly Bridge Fdn. available?
Even after the explanation, I have a concern about how a sufficient and qualified staff will be recruited for that many classrooms. I know Verner is very familiar with this challenge. The pandemic and closures may assist in recruitment, in an unfortunate way, but hopefully and eventually, we will need all these slots when the economy recovers.
It sounds as if there will be a large reliance for staff on "CTE students considering early childhood careers." As expressed on other occasions, I am concerned these students are young and typically have the minimum amount of preparation and credentials.

FY2021 ECE Grantee Site Visits

Grantee: **Christine Avery Learning Center**

What information would you like to share with other committee members who were not able to attend this site visit?

They appear to be advancing in the areas of focus. I was impressed by their work. The largest concern, perhaps because I need more information, was about the constraints the Church presents in terms of maintenance and overall conditions. Also, it will be interesting to see how they progress in their teacher education work. Also, teacher pay was of concern for Cici. She is unable to pay teachers a living wage- 98% of the teachers there are African American.

What feedback do you have for the grantee?

I was impressed by their work. Their work is important. This is an important relationship for the County.

FY2021 ECE Grantee Site Visits

Grantee: **Christine Avery Learning Center**

What information would you like to share with other committee members who were not able to attend this site visit?

The high need for and positive benefits of the behavioral specialist that the fund provided at the center and for families.

88% of students are on child care subsidy.

Total enrollment is 60 students. They have about 52% of that who attend on average, including 12 NCP-K students.

Glad to see they are tracking the number of staff enrolled in pursuit of degrees or credential above current levels.

Hope they are able to meet both of the major goals they mentioned: upgrading the playground and raising salaries to get each staff person at or exceeding a living wage.

What feedback do you have for the grantee?

Very glad to see the center active again.

While it may be due to adjustments for COVID, and perhaps the tour just didn't show it, however, the visual stimulation, play areas/centers, furniture, manipulatives, etc. in the classroom seemed diminished. I realize it's only the first quarter, but I hope the money in the grant for this purpose can be spent soon.

The same is true for the \$50,000 in training/travel. Probably not much travel going on, but advanced training and degree attainment is super important.

The design of the playground is fundamental as well as equipment. Avery may want to visit the new playground at the Don Collins Center to possibly see some new ideas, even though Avery may not have the space of that one.

FY2021 ECE Grantee Site Visits

Grantee: **Community Action Opportunities**

What information would you like to share with other committee members who were not able to attend this site visit?

This group is working diligently to maintain staffing and services in the current reality created by the pandemic. ECE funding supports two classrooms, a full day/full year program for 15 children at the Burton Recreation Center and a school day/school year program at Johnston Elementary. These programs are geared toward preparing children to enter kindergarten and through other support funding streams also provide services to families in the form of case management. The Johnston program currently serves eight children in person and three virtually with a few slots available while the Burton program is full. They work on academic and behavioral preparedness as well as trauma-informed empathy and emotional self-awareness using established models such as Second Step (secondstep.org). Theirs appears to be a fairly holistic model and their cohort from last year appears to have transitioned successfully.

What feedback do you have for the grantee?

The dedication and enthusiasm shown by the numerous staff in attendance is testament to their sense of purpose with regard to their work. Also, the length of employment of many of those staff members including the director Brian Repass seems to indicate deep satisfaction with their work. It is hoped that the empty slots at Johnston can be filled to provide this valuable service to all eligible children.

FY2021 ECE Grantee Site Visits

Grantee: **Donald S Collins Early Learning Center**

What information would you like to share with other committee members who were not able to attend this site visit?

The site visit was with the current director and the board chair, both of whom were extremely impressive in both their knowledge and energy. They have an excellent team in place for moving this center forward, demonstrating flexibility and creativity in dealing with the pandemic, as well as an openness to helping their community in any way they can. The cost overruns for the playground seemed completely understandable, and their progress in the midst of low enrollment because of Covid is very impressive.

What feedback do you have for the grantee?

Thank you for an enlightening and inspiring site visit. Keep up the good work! I love your idea of creating a temporary fund to help families who don't quite qualify for subsidy to make it through this extremely difficult time.

FY2021 ECE Grantee Site Visits

Grantee: **Donald S Collins Early Learning Center**

What information would you like to share with other committee members who were not able to attend this site visit?

During the site visit with Donald S Collins Early Learning, their Director, Monnie, gave the committee input on an area of need. She explained that as more and more parents lose their jobs (especially now due to COVID), they are often faced with the dilemma of having to leave their small children at home while they seek other employment because they can't afford childcare. She said it would be great if there was a short-term scholarship program to allow the parents to have their children in childcare while they seek employment.

What feedback do you have for the grantee?

N/A

FY2021 ECE Grantee Site Visits

Grantee: **Donald S Collins Early Learning Center**

What information would you like to share with other committee members who were not able to attend this site visit?

- Impressed with the ways the board and staff have adapted, given the challenges of transitioning from the former center to the new building and then dealing with COVID that demanded different ways to serve and use their new resources. This includes virtual learning, assisting with a POD, and keeping the center open despite a very different financial model than initially created.
- The natural playground looks as if it will be a real asset.
- It's impressive that all staff have a minimum of an Associates degree. (I believe that's what I heard.). Not sure how many were in Early Childhood Education.
- Very pleased to see they are tracking the educational attainment, engagement, and credentials of the their staff.
- It was obvious that the Board Chair and Director are "on it", creative, very committed, and managing all the challenges well.
- An interesting nugget they shared was the positive way behavior improved in children when they moved to the new space vs. the former center.

What feedback do you have for the grantee?

- I wish we had seen images with a wider view: the center's setting, environs, classrooms, gathering spaces, parking, neighbors, furniture, etc. We saw many wonderful close-ups of children's faces. For this purpose, however, it would have been good to see much more of the building's spaces, including the classroom environments by age group.
- With the Primary School being next door, I would like to see a very close working relationship between the staff at the center and the kindergarten teachers at the school. How can bridges be built so that Early Childhood Educators know what the K expect of the children and what the K assessment is measuring. Then share feedback on the assessment's results with the ECE staff.

FY2021 ECE Grantee Site Visits

Grantee: **Irene Wortham Center**

What information would you like to share with other committee members who were not able to attend this site visit?

This program is very well managed and provides essential services and support to families, children and educators in Buncombe County. The Grant's focus on social emotional support, well implemented, gives those children whose behavior impacts their ability to learn in the classroom with peers, tools to manage their behaviors in a positive way. The contracted Behavior Therapists are able to mentor staff and families, promoting new skills across environments. Although enrollment is down due to COVID-19, mentoring of staff by behavior therapists and parent engagement sessions have actually increased, resulting in improved learning environments at school and at home. Teacher retention is also a bonus. The Early Learning Center uses the CorAdvantage Program (Kaymbu) very successfully to increase engagement with families, including families who have lower incomes and may only have a phone vs computer access. The CorAdvantage Program is also designed to embed IFSP and IEP goals in lesson plans and capture students' progress data. The Director reports that teachers love the program's ease of use and multi-functionality. Wireless head sets for the new Listening Centers provide educational resources as well as "stimulus shelters" for children who need to refocus. Aimee Spooner, Director, explained management of the Center's health and safety during the COVID epidemic and it appears to be exemplary; well-considered for both physical safety and mental health. This is a very impressive program. The Director, when asked specifically to mention concerns or wishes, expressed fears about continued funding in these uncertain times, specifically in relation to the essential Behavior Therapists. Since children's behavior has been so positive with fewer students coming from other centers as well as lower enrollment, there is a concern that the therapists might not be viewed as necessary. However, the expanded training they have been able to have in weekly family sessions (33 meetings with 22 families) and with the educators, is the kind of wrap-around bonus that helps children become successful life-long learners, helps their parents and siblings and allows educators to practice new skills with coaching. The Director suggested that creation of a round table, forum or chat-board of local Early Childhood Educators/Programs might be useful so Centers can share ideas and work together on best practices during these difficult times.

What feedback do you have for the grantee?

I am totally impressed with your program! I was a fan before, but now am a "super-fan". I will just copy what I reported to other committee members in hopes I got it right (my dogs needed intervention by a BehaviorTherapist during the virtual visit!). :

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have lower incomes and may only have a phone vs computer access. The CorAdvantage Program is also designed to embed IFSP and IEP goals in lesson plans and capture students' progress data. The Director reports that teachers love the program's ease of use and multi-functionality. Wireless head sets for the new Listening Centers provide educational resources as well as "stimulus shelters" for children who need to refocus. Aimee Spooner, Director, explained management of the Center's health and safety during the COVID epidemic and it appears to be exemplary; well-considered for both physical safety and mental health. This is a very impressive program. The Director, when asked specifically to mention concerns or wishes, expressed fears about continued funding in these uncertain times, specifically in relation to the essential Behavior Therapists. Since children's behavior has been so positive with fewer students coming from other centers as well as lower enrollment, there is a concern that the therapists might not be viewed as necessary. However, the expanded training they have been able to have in weekly family sessions (33 meetings with 22 families) and with the educators, is the kind of wrap-around bonus that helps children become successful life-long learners, helps their parents and siblings and allows educators to practice new skills with coaching. The Director suggested that creation of a round table, forum or chat-board of local Early Childhood Educators/Programs might be useful so Centers can share ideas and work together on best practices during these difficult times.

I think this is a great idea, but also think you might end up spear-heading it because your program is so "together". And, I wonder if there isn't something out there already that could be used as a platform with some tweaking and outreach.

I didn't get a chance to ask about your kitchen sets and whether or not you are able to utilize them during this time, however, if I had to pick one "center" that promotes social / emotional learning and interaction between typically developing kids and those who have special needs, that would be the area. I look forward to seeing any (redacted) materials you can send along from the CorAdvantage program. I wonder if the data collection capability would lend itself to any sort of interesting research about social emotional development, parent engagement.....?

Thanks for your work!

FY2021 ECE Grantee Site Visits

Grantee: **OnTrack Financial Services**

What information would you like to share with other committee members who were not able to attend this site visit?

The program we are helping to fund, the SECURE savings program, has a proven track record of helping to build the savings habit with its participants. The organization is very well-organized and set up to make the program as impactful as possible.

What feedback do you have for the grantee?

I hope you can collect some testimonials from child care participants at the end of the program!

FY2021 ECE Grantee Site Visits

Grantee: **OnTrack Financial Services**

What information would you like to share with other committee members who were not able to attend this site visit?

OnTrack is doing a very good job with the ECE grant. The pandemic has delayed progress a bit, but there's a plan in place for significant outreach beginning Jan. 2021 to get early childhood teachers to participate in the SECURE matched savings program.

What feedback do you have for the grantee?

Thank you, OnTrack, for your creativeness and ingenuity as you work your way through the pandemic. We are looking forward to seeing a good group of SECURE participants and to understanding what difference these savings vehicles can make to strengthen the early childhood workforce.

FY2021 ECE Grantee Site Visits

Grantee: **PODER Emma Bilingual ECE Network and Shared Services Cooperative**

What information would you like to share with other committee members who were not able to attend this site visit?

The network and cooperative presented an overview of their work and current activities. They have done a remarkable job responding to COVID while also creating a network of essential early childhood educators embedded in neighborhoods. Some of their educators have come from careers in bilingual education. PODER Emma educators are creating curriculum with material boxes for teaching and documenting developmental targets. They rotate these materials with COVID protocols in place. They plan on doubling the number of curriculum boxes during this year. COVID has been a true challenge highlighting their work as educators of the children of essential workers. The value of respecting and financially compensating educators who are Spanish speaking helps instill in the children pride in their culture and gives them a firm preschool education that includes their first language with their families and activities at home. I hope this model for an educational co-op (and it is really multifaceted) can expand beyond Buncombe County. Documentation status was stated as an additional barrier.

What feedback do you have for the grantee?

You do wonderful work which I hope you are able to model in ways that can be used beyond Buncombe County by other communities. Although your 1st quarter progress sheet indicated that you currently have no Enrichment Visiting Teachers, it seems you have found opportunities for enrichment nevertheless (Healing & Stress Management and Phonological Awareness workshops). You have a multifaceted organization with the Co-op and the Network and the 8 Little Schools and their educators/directors. Your boundless creativity in responding to needs (education, business help, documentation, COVID health, cultural promotion and pride, curriculum development and on) is focused energy. The schools are so essential in anchoring neighborhoods and providing care and early childhood education to children - and now, in COVID-time, giving essential workers support. Your teachers sound amazing and I would like to "meet" them in the future. One of the questions I heard from the Board focused on how children do in public school when their early childhood education is primarily Spanish-based. I know there is a body of research that supports the efficacy of first language strength with second language acquisition skill, academic success and general cognitive flexibility enduring through adulthood. But I imagine many educators are not familiar with it. You indicated that public schools have been receptive to your students and their educational backgrounds, but wouldn't it be fun to use some sort of documentation of acquired skills to go with kids (like a tiny learning passport) when they start school so public school teachers know that your students have acquired those essential preschool skills and strong language base? The MacArthur Bates Communicative Inventories (language focused) are in both English and Spanish. Parents can help fill in working with teachers. There are probably other instruments that could be used that are strong in other domains that would also be parent and teacher friendly. The educators would want to decide what works best with their curriculum and student population. Just a thought.

FY2021 ECE Grantee Site Visits

Grantee: **PODER Emma Bilingual ECE Network and Shared Services Cooperative**

What information would you like to share with other committee members who were not able to attend this site visit?

The grantee is engaged, enthusiastic, and passionate. It is clear to me that this work, although being done of necessity on a relatively small scale, is very important for ECE in Buncombe County.

What feedback do you have for the grantee?

I am grateful for the opportunity to learn firsthand about the work you are doing. Please keep in touch with the Early Childhood Committee to inform us of your progress and how we may be of help in the future.

FY2021 ECE Grantee Site Visits

Grantee: **Valley Child Development Center (Southwestern Child Development)**

What information would you like to share with other committee members who were not able to attend this site visit?

The facility itself is well organized and developmentally geared to the different age groups served. The educators and directors are managing COVID health and safety issues well (though I forgot to ask about mask use). The classroom design lends itself to health and safety and they are taking cleaning precautions. They are regrouping after having lost several staff members to other jobs. Because of the COVID hiatus, developmental assessments have been on hold, but they hope to start using the Creative Curriculum to assess all students as soon as they have a teacher trained. The HS parents return to school this week - 1 group this Th and F and a different set on M & T. Though enrollment is down to 17, this will increase enrollment by 5 more and the parenting club (VCDC) will be able to start up again. The Lending program for parents has continued throughout to meet community needs. The facility's willingness to respond to parent needs for longer hours when the logistics for health/safety are complex is commendable! So is the Center's welcome (open slots) for children who are in Foster Care and Kinship placements. The Center is actively recruiting parents of former students and new ones as well. The Center appears to need additional technology to address some of the changing needs for communication during COVID.

What feedback do you have for the grantee?

I am very impressed with your Center. The facility is wonderful and you have made each classroom/playground/strollers we viewed developmentally appropriate for varying age groups. You all seem absolutely devoted to providing wonderful education and care to children and families. I forgot to ask you about your take on mask use and to ask about how (if) you are able to care for kids who have special needs. Your willingness to serve children who are in Foster Care and Kinship Placements is great, as is your willingness to respond to parent needs for longer hours when the logistics of staffing them safely is such a challenge. In my note to committee members, I mentioned that you might have additional technology needs should COVID restrictions continue or tighten. One of my concerns is about the health and safety of babies with very young parents during this stressful time and finding ways to check in on them and support their mental health and development if they are not able to attend school in person. The VCDC Club is a great idea to keep going no matter what, as this population is particularly vulnerable and they happen to be really spectacular at using tech! Thank you for having us and sharing. You do wonderful work!
I hope to visit again in person.

FY2021 ECE Grantee Site Visits

Grantee: **Warren Wilson College**

What information would you like to share with other committee members who were not able to attend this site visit?

There are many moving parts to this grant and, given the withdrawal of AB Tech, some realignment had to occur to meet the stated goals of increasing highly qualified early childhood professionals. The recalibration of offering classes in Early Childhood Career and Technical Education courses at Owen HS has actually been a boon in nearly doubling the number of students participating in coursework. This student cohort, though a tad younger than the original target groups, has ethnic and racial diversity. COVID has impacted Verner Center's ability to host students, however the current students' curriculum is designed for hands-on participation in the classrooms next year, giving the program a chance to redesign activities/educational programming, if needed, should there be continuing COVID restrictions. The partners who work together (Maura Davis from Warren Wilson, Amy White, Career Development Coordinator, Gina Toomey, Administrator Owen HS and Deborah Chappell, Educator, Owen HS) have been able to create a solid program through flexible rearrangement of those many moving parts. We were very interested in the qualitative research Dr. Davis is conducting to identify specific needs of early childhood educators in relation to returning to school. Suggestions were made to use these qualitative results to create a schema to help educators identify paths back to school in relation to identified barriers, as well as mentor/buddy support for returning students, especially first generation college students and students of color. Of course we want this research to help local and regional educators, but if designed well, the resources could be adapted for any region, making it a more universal tool. Dr. Davis is also using this opportunity to recruit students. This project is rich with possibility. Its complexity is being handled flexibly and enthusiastically by the project team. 0 grant money has been used this quarter as they are still drawing on \$ from last year.

What feedback do you have for the grantee?

What a complex and exciting grant! You could probably tell by our enthusiasm how important we feel this work and research is to increasing the number and diversity of Early Childhood Educators in our region while also enhancing their skills. In my report to the committee I mentioned that your grant has many moving parts which you have successfully realigned following the withdrawal of AB-Tech and the challenges of COVID. I got the impression you are a flexible team that can regroup as needed to accomplish goals in a variety of ways. I am particularly interested in the "recruitment / return to school /support" research project. This qualitative research could lead to the development of a schema to help educators find a clear path back to school in relation to identified barriers, as well as needed mentor/buddy support for returning students, especially first generation college students and students of color. Of course we want this research to help our local and regional educators, but if designed well, it is a resource that could be adapted for any region, making it a more universal tool. Very exciting! Looking forward to your next review.

FY2021 ECE Grantee Site Visits

Grantee: **YWCA**

What information would you like to share with other committee members who were not able to attend this site visit?

They seem to be weathering the twin storms of COVID and personnel changes well and are trying to adapt by opening a program for school-aged children as well. There remain some regulatory hurdles as the room in use requires environmental approval but this service adds to the coffers during a difficult time. They also continue to work toward meeting the terms of the contract and have added 11 of the 14 promised slots with 10 classrooms now online. They have not reached their pre-COVID levels but with Phase 3 in place they are increasing the classroom limit from 13 to 18 in pursuit of their licensed limit of 153 children. They are also striving to maintain staffing, a constant challenge. The typical teacher retention rate is 52% though they have set an ambitious goal of 90%, with current retention at 82% for the first quarter. They offer an attractive benefits package in addition to a pay increase facilitated by the ECE grant. Finally, they offer their sincere appreciation to the committee and the commissioners for providing important financial support.

What feedback do you have for the grantee?

Kudos for pivoting to an adaptive program upgrade to support their families and their program, the school-aged children room. Their enthusiasm for the children is infectious and it is hoped that any residual factors contributing to the high-level personnel changes can be ironed out.