

**President's Report**  
**NC Pre-K Planning Committee and Board of Directors Meeting**  
**Charles Morris Room**

Thursday, December 12, 2024

**A. NCPC/DCDEE Updates / Legislative Updates**

**1. NCPC**

- This month's sample story is about **Hearts for Children Childcare and Learning Center**. This is an example of the coaching that occurs in childcare programs. See attached.
- **NCPC has sent out their legislative agenda** for the Long Session for the biennial budget. It is attached, but may be adjusted. If it is revised we will provide the most up to date version.
- **LPAC (Local Partnership Advisory Committee)**. Mary Sonnenberg and Meredith Gronski serve on LPAC as Mid-East region representatives. Mary begins as Chair of LPAC beginning January 2025. In addition, LPAC voted on recommendations for NCPC Board Committees. Sharon Moyer's nomination to be on NCPC's Fund Development Committee has been approved by the NCPC Board.
- **We have received our final audit – with no findings. Next item to be completed is our 990.** All materials have been provided to the CPA completing the 990, including the audit. Thanks to everyone for the work on a daily basis to be accountable for our funding and responsible to the children and families and providers in our community.
- **DPIL Update** – In the last biennial budget, the legislature approved \$1.5M in nonrecurring dollars for DPIL. Even with this increase of nonrecurring funds, caps were placed on Local Partnerships for enrollment. The DPIL Advisory Committee has worked on how to manage DPIL enrollment based on the limitations of \$7M annually in recurring funds. **Effective January 2025, no new enrollees can be added across the state. Spending is being capped at 225,000 children due to the limited funds.** We work with United Way who is the local affiliate for our DPIL program. We will be meeting with them to collaborate on this program. Without additional funding, wait lists will most likely be in place after the first of the year. NCPC is working with their lobbyist to request additional recurring funding, but there will be no answers on the outcome before plans need to be put in place to manage program funds.
- **NCPC had been working to put together health insurance benefits to be available to the network.** This ended up not being feasible. **The NC Center for Nonprofits** has been able to put together an Association for health benefits that are available to members of the Center. NCPC has a membership that covers all local partnerships. In many cases, they were not competitive with current benefits. We did provide census data, but are not making a change at this time. We are reviewing the quotes that were provided to us with Charles Morris, who is our broker for healthcare benefits. We will continue to follow up to assess the best prices for healthcare benefits.
- **NCPC is working on a compensation study for the network.** This is concurrent with our own project to review and revise our pay structure and position evaluation method in alignment with our sustainability and succession planning goals. Anthony Ramos, HR Manager, will be participating with NCPC as their study proceeds. NCPC is working with 1000Feathers on this project.

**2. DCDEE**

- **The NC Child Care Commission** met on December 9, 2024 to review the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) rules. The rules are not final yet, but DCDEE is holding QRIS Information Sessions December 10, 11 and 12, 2024. The opportunity to submit formal public comments about the proposed rules will occur when they are published in the new year.

### 3. State Level

- The NC House and Senate passed a wide-ranging omnibus bill that included \$33.75M to DHHS to provide child care programs with stabilization grants for another three months beyond December, through March 2025. The Senate voted to override the Governor's veto of the bill on December 2, 2024. The House will vote on December 11, 2024 on whether or not to override the bill.
- NC's 2025 legislative session will begin January. It is possible that the General Assembly will address additional funds for Hurricane Helene relief outside the budget process once they are back in session.
- The NC Center for Nonprofits sends out a weekly policy update. Follow this [link](#) to read the most recent update.

### 4. Federal Level

- Congress returned to their offices on December 2, 2024. December 20, 2024 is the deadline to reach a deal on the FY 2025 appropriation bills.

### 5. Local Level

- We extend our heartfelt congratulations to Dr. Marvin Connelly on his retirement announcement. Dr. Connelly has been an active and engaged member of the PFC Board during his time as Superintendent of Cumberland County Schools. We appreciate his support, collaboration, and his vision for a universal application system for our NC Pre-K program.

## B. Grant Opportunities/Updates/RFPs

- The City of Fayetteville's ARPA grant was terminated effective November 8, 2024 and the \$200,000 advance amount received in September 2022 was returned to the City on November 14, 2024. Additional funds of \$400,000 from a new contract with the City is in process. We plan to use these funds to support Family Connects (\$285,600), an Early Childhood Workforce Development program (\$78,037) and 10% indirect expenses (\$36,363). We have met with City of Fayetteville staff and their ARPA consultant to review the contract and address wording and parameters. The new contract is anticipated to end December 2026. The timeline is to execute the contract before the holidays.

## C. Staff Updates

- **Congratulations! to Kesia Wilson, Accounting Associate**, who graduates from Fayetteville State University on December 13, 2024 with a Bachelor of Science in Accounting.
- **We currently do not have any open positions!**

## D. Events

- **Building Construction Status:** The contractor is in the final phase of getting all inspections completed and the Certificate of Occupancy issued by the City of Fayetteville.
- **NC Pre-K Let's Get Enrolled:** Please share the URL: [LetsGetEnrolled.com](https://LetsGetEnrolled.com). **We are launching applications for the 2025-2026 school year on January 22, 2025.**
- **Giving Tuesday:** We were proud to be part of the Cumberland Community Foundation's Giving Tuesday event again this year. **Thanks to everyone who made their board donation through the Giving Tuesday Campaign and shared the information widely.** We do not have final numbers yet, but anticipate those shortly.
- **Staff Luncheon – December 16, 2024** at Highland Presbyterian Church. Following lunch and fellowship, staff will have the remainder of the afternoon off.
- **Barnes & Noble Book Drive: began on November 1 and ends December 12.** The first round of books was picked up on November 25, 2024. The community donated 848 books with an in-kind value of \$6,320.90. We will pick up the remaining books on December 13, 2024. A final thank you post with updated book totals will be posted following the December 13<sup>th</sup> pickup.
- **Little Land: Big Play for Families:** We still need your support in seeking vendors and sponsors and spreading the word. Please visit [ccpfc.org/littleland](https://ccpfc.org/littleland) for downloadable images and vendor and sponsorship links. We have secured many of our return activities and are looking forward to the NC Zoo and PBS Rootle attending and incorporating Arts Land. Event date is February 15, 2025 from 10:00 am – 2:00 pm.

## **HEARTS FOR CHILDREN CHILDCARE AND LEARNING CENTER**

We provided coaching and technical support to Hearts for Children Childcare and Learning Center in the Program Administration Scale (PAS) and Preschool Outdoor Environment Measurement Scale (POEMS). This story will focus on POEMS. While coaching Hearts for Children on the PAS, I noticed that Hearts for Children would be a great candidate for POEMS. Hearts for Children had very little playground material, making it hard to provide high-quality outdoor interaction and a play and learning environment for the children in their program. After explaining POEMS to the director, she was receptive and eager to go through POEMS. After completing the POEMS preassessment, we were better able to identify what areas needed improvement to increase the quality of the outdoor environment for the program. Our main focus was on the domains that scored below 70%—fortunately, Hearts for Children qualified for the material grant offered by our agency. With the support of a materials grant to purchase outdoor materials and the investment from the site, Hearts for Children increased their scores and, most importantly, the program's quality. (edited)

Results of the post-assessment on all domains after incorporating material purchased with the material grant and material purchased by the director/site are below:

- Domain 1: Physical Environment - score moved from 77% to 92%
- Domain 2: Interaction - score moved from 38% to 85%
- Domain 3: Play & Learning Settings - score moved from 31% to 85%
- Domain 4: Program - score moved from 22% to 100%
- Domain 5: Teacher/Caregiver Role - No change in score 88%



# 2025 Smart Start Public Policy Agenda

The Smart Start Network is North Carolina's state-to-local system of comprehensive early childhood programs and services. The network works in partnership with nonprofits, businesses, and government agencies to leverage funding and streamline services statewide for young children and their families.

Smart Start ensures effective and efficient delivery of resources as a key administrator and funder of programs like Dolly Parton's Imagination Library (DPIL), WAGES, NC Pre-K, and child care subsidies. By coordinating financial and programmatic support, the Network builds a seamless system that empowers families and strengthens early childhood development.

According to Untapped Potential, a 2024 NC Chamber of Commerce report, NC is losing \$5.65 billion annually due to insufficient child care accessibility and affordability. Smart Start is committed to focusing on this issue and strengthening North Carolina's early childhood system.

## Smart Start's FY23-24 Impact:

### Improving access to quality early care and education

**23.7% (1,262) of North Carolina's child care programs** participated in Smart Start programs to improve child care quality through training, consultation, and coaching.

Smart Start provided compensation support to **4,300+ professionals**, contributing to a **lower turnover rate of 17.4%** among teachers receiving compensation—well below the 2023 state average of 38%.

### Advancing child and family health

**26 Smart Start Local Partnerships** supported **214 child care programs** with mental and behavioral health Technical Assistance (TA) consultation and coaching.

### Providing comprehensive family support

**74 Local Partnerships** provided family support services to enhance maternal and child health, school readiness for children, and increase parent resilience, and maternal employment.

## Smart Start's Recommendations for 2025 Legislative Session:



### Increase Smart Start's general funds by \$15 million annually.

North Carolina continues to face an early childhood crisis. More funding will help Smart Start improve the quality and increase the accessibility and affordability of early care and education, expand infant and maternal health programs, and support families as the first and primary caregivers.

*This crisis, fueled by rising costs, the expiration of federal pandemic funding, and North Carolina's growing population of families with children, demands immediate action. Without additional unrestricted, recurring general funding allocated to Smart Start during the 2023-2025 biennium, the child care crisis will continue and impact more families with young children.*



### Allow 10% administrative allowance for NC Pre-K.

Smart Start requests a minimum of 10% NC Pre-K administrative rate to better align with the federal de minimis rate of 15% since much of NC Pre-K funding is federal. Administrative funds support the critical needs for recruitment and retention of skilled staff for quality program operations.

*Currently, 46 Local Partnerships administer half of NC Pre-K contracts, and all 75 Partnership Board Chairs, or designees, co-chair their counties' NC Pre-K Committees.*



### Increase recurring funding by \$3 million annually for Dolly Parton's Imagination Library(DPIL).

Smart Start received \$1.5 million, nonrecurring funding during the 2023-2025 biennium to serve approximately 300,000 children, 50% of eligible children. However, to maintain and grow enrollment, recurring funding is needed. Most Local Partnerships also fund DPIL through private funding, and paired with a recurring increase, the impact of DPIL can reach more families. Parents participating in DPIL for any length of time reported an annual reading increase to their children daily from 45% before receiving books to 67% after DPIL participation. With additional funding, Smart Start and DPIL can continue to enhance family literacy across NC.

*Increasing funds will expand enrollment to 60% of NC's eligible children and enhance literacy across NC. Without additional recurring funding, new enrollment will cease in 2025.*

#### Additional recurring funding will allow:

- ▶ Monthly book delivery to approximately 350,000 children. FY2025 costs will average \$31.20 annually per child (\$10,920,000).
- ▶ Community outreach and recruitment by Smart Start (\$660,000).
- ▶ The NC Partnership for Children's statewide implementation, evaluation, and program expansion support (\$100,000).



### Invest in long-term solutions for early childhood teachers.

Teachers' compensation and education are directly linked to early care and education quality. This is why, in SFY 23-24, 64 Smart Start Local Partnerships invested in Child Care WAGE\$, supporting 4,079 teachers with semi-annual, education-based stipends.

*Research proves investments in high-quality early childhood education provide short-term and long-term outcomes for children, families, and NC's economy, but ECE teachers are still among the lowest paid workers in North Carolina.*

#### Smart Start supports:

- ▶ Appropriating WAGE\$ funding for statewide implementation, making compensation available to all 100 counties through every Local Partnership.
- ▶ Additional compensation supports to recognize ECE teachers' value.
- ▶ Funding for ECE teachers' health insurance.



### Strengthen and sustain the early childhood system through innovation and collaboration.

*This collaboration and innovation will sustain and strengthen NC's early childhood system and the state's economy.*

#### Smart Start supports these collaborative efforts:

- ▶ Expanding or converting NC Tri-Share Child Care Pilot Program to a permanent program, providing stability to employees and employers.
- ▶ Increasing child care subsidy reimbursement rates and incorporating a statewide subsidy floor.
- ▶ Fully funding the NC Pre-K Program and exploring alternative funding models to increase the rate and reach more eligible children.
- ▶ Increasing behavioral support and reducing expulsions and suspensions in early learning settings.

## The North Carolina Partnership for Children

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