

**President's Report**  
**NC Pre-K Committee and Board of Directors Meeting**  
**Methodist University, Matthews Ministry Center, Bldg. 21**  
Thursday, December 11, 2025

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

**1. NCPC**

- This month's special story focuses on the first Annual Grilled Cheese Festival.
- Carry-forward funding [\$214,209] budgets are going to the Board for approval.
- Carry-forward caps were decreased by 10% for FY 26. Our cap will be \$190,261.
- Marta Hester's Public Policy Update is attached.

**2. DCDEE**

- **Region 5:** Payment for these activities continues to be up to date. Amendments have been executed to allocate additional funds for HSB and B3QI to complete their six-month contracts. Due to attrition, both contracts will end on December 31, 2025.
- Child Care Resources, Inc. (CCRI) (the current contractor for the HSB project) was awarded the new contract for HSB. They will not subcontract any services. Staff will work directly for the project. The award for B3QI has not been announced, but we have received information that they will directly hire specialists as well. Our B3QI Specialists have both taken other positions.
- CCRI is doing listening sessions regarding the RFA for CORE services in the South Central region of NC. We will be meeting with them on December 15.
- **NC Pre-K:** All 18 requests for extensions for 12 additional weeks for Long Term Substitutes have been approved.
- **At the Winter Meeting for NC Pre-K** the plan for reallocation of slots to contractors who could place additional children was reviewed. These sites will also get administrative funds as part of the reallocation. Additionally, all contractors will receive a small increase in administrative funds for the remainder of this school year. It is not a permanent increase. Amounts and budget templates will be sent to contractors by the end of December, with contract amendments taking effect on January 30, 2026.

**3. State Level**

- NC continues to be the only state without a final state budget for FY26.
- For details of the session and federal updates, refer to the NC Center for Nonprofits' [December 5th Public Policy update](#).

**4. Federal Level**

- The federal government is under a continuing resolution through January 30, 2026.

**5. Local Level**

- The United Way of Cumberland County through the re-established Literacy Council is coordinating with the Cumberland County Library for Dolly Parton Imagination Story Hours.
- Cumberland County Schools continues to host Be Strong Families Parent Cafes. The schedule for the remainder of the school year is attached.

**B. Grant Opportunities/Updates/RFPs**

- Our County and City of Fayetteville grants are all active. Requests for reimbursements and data requests are being managed by fiscal and programmatic staff.

- Building construction is moving forward. The construction schedule indicates work will continue through January. Mike will provide updates to staff and tenants as different areas are impacted.
- Our request to Golden *LEAF* for capital funding for Phase III of the Building project was denied.
- Additional information was sent to the Cannon Foundation that the building project has started, along with answers to questions from their Board. We just received notice that we have been awarded the full amount requested of \$100,000 for use on Phase 3 of the building project.

### C. Staff Updates

- **Early Literacy and Play Coordinator and Communications & Digital Media Specialist – recruiting and interviewing.** If you are interested in or would like to refer a candidate for these full-time positions, please contact Anthony Ramos ([aramos@ccpfc.org](mailto:aramos@ccpfc.org)) for more information.
- **Farewell to Michelle Jones, HSB Specialist.** CCRI has won the contract for the HSB project and will not subcontract for regional coverage. Michelle will be going to work for CCRI in the capacity of HSB Specialist. Her last day with the Partnership will be December 31. We wish her well as she continues her work as a behavior specialist with the new HSB project.
- **Farewell to Tonya McCall, Birth-3 Specialist.** Tonya has taken a new position at the Hoke County Partnership as an Early Childhood Consultant. She will put her infant/toddler skills together with her early childhood experience in serving providers in Hoke County. We wish her well in this new position.
- **Staff Holiday Luncheon was held on December 10 with a Hawaiian theme.** Following the luncheon festivities, staff had the remainder of the day off.

### D. Events/Recognitions

- **NC Pre-K Let's Get Enrolled – Applications for the 2025-2026 school year are still being accepted.** Please share the URL: [LetsGetEnrolled.com](https://letsgetenrolled.com). Contact Ar-Nita Davis ([adavis@ccpfc.org](mailto:adavis@ccpfc.org)). Promotional materials for the 2026-2027 school year have been released on social media and are posted on our website. Pre-K Be the First to Know 26/27 school year email invitation launched December 7. There are already 98 families signed up to know when applications launch in January. Applications for the new school year will launch January 22.
- **Barnes and Noble Book Drive** – The dates for this year's book drive are November 1 – December 15. We are thrilled to be recipients of the local store's book drive. The combined total for Round 1 and 2 of delivery of books in **November and December is 1,270 books with an in-kind value of \$9,567.**
- **Freedom Christian Academy's National Honor Society Book Drive** – December 1-12. They are accepting new and gently used children's books. This effort is benefitting the Partnership's Literacy Initiatives. Delivery will occur prior to their holiday break.
- **It's a Pajama Party! – December 13, 10:00-11:30 am.** Registration is required. Kids will be in cozy pajamas for a morning of cheerful holiday stories and festive songs by the "fireplace"!
- **Giving Tuesday:** The Cumberland Community Foundation's Giving Tuesday event wrapped up. **Giving Tuesday donations were amplified through generous donors to the Cumberland Community Foundation.** Final numbers will not be available until the end of December. Initial information from CCF indicates it was a very successful campaign with increased donations from last year.
- **Little Land BIG Play for Families 2026 – Save the date for March 14, 2026 from 10:00 am – 2:00 pm at the Crown Expo Center.** The website is updated and live. Now accepting vendor applications: <https://ccpfc.org/littleland/little-land-vendor-agreement/>.
- **Grilled Cheese Festival – Save the date for November 7, 2026.**

## The First Annual Grilled Cheese Festival: A Community Triumph in Support of Partnership for Children of Cumberland County

The sun shone brightly over Hope Mills as the first annual **Grilled Cheese Festival** unfolded at the beautiful **Dirtbag Ales and Taproom**. The weather was perfect, setting the stage for a day filled with laughter, music, and the irresistible aroma of melted cheese.

### A Ticket Selling Success

- More than **500 tickets** were sold, proving that the community was hungry not only for grilled cheese but also for connection and purpose.
- Food trucks lined the venue, each crafting their own grilled cheese masterpieces—gooey, golden, and inventive enough to make even the most devoted cheese lover swoon.
- Local vendors added to the magic, offering creative items and tasty treats that kept festival-goers browsing and snacking throughout the day.

### Entertainment & Energy

- **Five Star Entertainment** kept spirits high with music that had families and friends singing along.
- **Volunteers** gave generously of their time, ensuring every detail—from ticketing to cleanup—was handled with care and heart. Their support garnered nearly \$1800 in in-kind support.

### The Big Cheese Battle

The highlight of the day was the fierce but friendly competition to crown the **Grilled Cheese Supreme**. After countless bites and ballots, the **People's Choice Big Cheese Award** went to **Bus Stop Melts**, whose gooey creation captured the hearts (and stomachs) of the crowd.

### Fundraising & Friend Raising

This wasn't just about food—it was about impact. Between cash donations and in-kind contributions, the festival raised nearly **\$12,000** to support programs and services benefiting local children and families.

### A Day to Remember

The festival was more than an event—it was a celebration of **community spirit, generous hearts, and full bellies**. It was proof that when neighbors come together, magic happens.

**From:** Marta Hester <[mhester@smartstart.org](mailto:mhester@smartstart.org)>

Good afternoon,

Thank you joining us this morning for the Smart Start Network Public Policy Meeting featuring Dr. Ruth Friedman and Samantha Cole. I am also sharing another recently updated resource for parents, [ICE know your rights fact sheet](#) by the Center for Law and Social Policy. The fact sheet includes information for parents, including information to address any disputes for minor child/ren. A special online training via Zoom for the early childhood community on immigration also will be held next Wednesday, Dec. 10<sup>th</sup> at 7 PM, hosted by the National Domestic Workers Alliance, MomsRising, BCDI-Carolinas, the NC Budget and Tax Center, Pathways Preschool Center, the MDC NC Home-Based Child Care Initiative, the Education Justice Alliance, and North Carolina Asian Americans Together. Register at: <https://ndwa.us/4oy1boG>

## **STATE UPDATES**

### **NC Governor's Task Force on Child Care and Early Education**

The December Governor's Task Force on Child Care and Early Education Meeting was held on Monday, December 3, 2025. Task force members have asked the group to also include child care for school age children under the scope. According to a report issued by the National Afterschool Alliance, in NC, 5.7 hours is the average time per week school-age children spend looking after themselves without adult supervision.

- [America After 3PM 2025](#)
- [After-school care in high demand for NC parents - EdNC](#) [After-school care in high demand for NC parents - EdNC](#)

### **Child Care Academies**

NC Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Child Development and Early Education, will implement a workforce initiative funded by a federal Preschool Development Grant. Please note this is separate from the legislative proposal for Child Care Academies.

The list of Child Care Academy Partners funded by DCDEE includes:

1. Appalachian State University
2. Bladen Community College
3. Central Carolina Community College
4. Central Piedmont Community College
5. Davidson-Davie Community College
6. Durham Technical Community College
7. Elizabeth City State University
8. Forsyth Technical Community College
9. Guilford Technical Community College
10. Montgomery Community College
11. Nash Community College
12. Pitt Community College
13. Roanoke-Chowan Community College
14. Sandhills Community College

15. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

16. Wilson Community College

- [NCDHHS Implements Child Care Academies to Address Early Care and Learning Crisis | NCDHHS](#)

### **NC Candidate Filing**

The official candidate filing period is now open with candidates for state and federal office having until Friday, December 19, 2025, to file for the March 3<sup>rd</sup> primary election. Senate President Pro Tempore Phil Berger will be challenged by Rockingham County Sheriff Sam Page in the Republican primary in the district that includes Rockingham and part of Guilford. Media outlets anticipated Page would run against Berger in this race several months again.

- [2026 primary candidate list by contest federal and state.pdf](#)
- [Unofficial Primary Election Candidates for 2027 NC House](#)
- [Unofficial - Primary Election Filing for 2027 Senate](#)

### **NC Department of Commerce Tiered Rankings**

The 40 most distressed counties are designated as Tier 1, the next 40 as Tier 2 and the 20 least distressed as Tier 3, with the county tiers calculated using the four factors below:

- Average unemployment rate
- Median household income
- Percentage growth in population
- Adjusted property tax base per capita

Eighteen counties will change tiers in 2026. Counties moving to a less distressed tier include Beaufort, Camden, Davie, Graham, Macon, Montgomery, Randolph, Stanly, and Surry. Counties moving to a more distressed tier include Buncombe, Burke, Granville, Haywood, Henderson, Jones, Madison, Pasquotank, and Yancey

- [County Distress Rankings \(Tiers\) | NC Commerce](#)

## **FEDERAL UPDATES**

### **Administration for Children and Families**

Alex J. Adams, PharmD, MPH, was sworn in on November 24, 2025, as Assistant Secretary for the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) by U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

### **Head Start's Role in Addressing Child Mental Health Issues**

Earlier this week, the Center for American Progress released a Head Start Study determining that one in ten children in the United States under the age of 5 currently suffers from a mental health issue. In rural communities, many families would have no access to help through licensed child care, or family support programs such as home visiting, mental health services, and early intervention, were it not for Head Start.

- [Head Start Is a Model for Supporting Child and Family Mental Health - Center for American Progress](#)

Current updates on child care facility openings and closings for the month of November 2025 will be shared as soon as it becomes available. The 2026 Smart Start Network Public Policy Agenda is still being revised. Once again, we will continue to advocate for our 2025 legislative priorities.

Please continue to keep me posted on your advocacy efforts and let me know how I may assist. The last Smart Start Network Public Policy Meeting for 2025 will be held on Friday, December 19, 2025.

Thank you,

Marta



**Marta T. Hester**  
Public Policy Director  
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**The North Carolina Partnership for Children**  
1100 Wake Forest Rd, Raleigh, NC 27604

# Be Strong Families Parent Cafés

## 2025-2026 Parent Café Schedule

December 11, 2025	1-3 p.m.	Fayetteville Metropolitan Housing Authority, 229 Lincoln Drive
January 8, 2026	1-3 p.m.	Fayetteville Metropolitan Housing Authority, 229 Lincoln Drive
February 6, 2026	9-11 a.m.	1307 Hillsboro Street
March 6, 2026	9-11 a.m.	1307 Hillsboro Street
April 17, 2026	9-11 a.m.	1307 Hillsboro Street
May 1, 2026	9-11 a.m.	1307 Hillsboro Street

Parent Cafés are physically and emotionally safe spaces where parents/caregivers talk and listen to one another about topics that matter to them. These highly structured, small group conversations promote peer-to-peer learning and deep self-reflection. Parents/caregivers of children of all ages are welcome to attend. As one participant stated, “the more you come, the more like family you become.” Agencies are encouraged to have their staff trained too.



### Five Protective Factors that Strengthen Families

Parent Café conversations are designed around the five Protective Factors: Parental Resilience, Social Connections, Knowledge of Parenting & Child Development, Concrete Support in Times of Need, and the Social & Emotional Competence of Children. By building on the strengths that parents already possess, Parent Café conversations examine how the knowledge and application of the Protective Factors can increase the chances of healthy outcomes for children, families, and communities.

\*\*\*\*Resources, door prizes, and refreshments will be provided during the Parent Café.\*\*\*\*

To reserve a seat or inquire about hosting a Parent Café, contact Wanda Wesley at 910-483-7370 or email [wandawesley@ccs.k12.nc.us](mailto:wandawesley@ccs.k12.nc.us). To learn more visit <https://www.beststrongfamilies.org/cafes-overview>

