

Early Childhood Education Priorities for the 2022 North Carolina Legislative Session

Early childhood education prepares children to be ready for kindergarten and beyond. You only get one chance at learning the fundamentals – how to read, how to talk, how to think. Studies indicate that early childhood education programs set kids up for success in kindergarten, reading at grade level, and high school graduation on time.¹

Every parent in every corner of North Carolina deserves the chance to choose early childhood education that will give their children a strong start for happy, healthy lives and greater school success. Stronger investments in early education will give more kids the opportunity to grow, learn, and succeed.

PRIORITY AREAS

✓ ACCESSIBILITY

\$73 million annually to fund a new child care subsidy rates structure.

Children deserve high-quality learning, which lays the foundation for success in school and life. Child care subsidies help provide early childhood opportunities to working families. Raising subsidy rates from the 2015 level to the 2018 level and establishing a statewide floor creates greater equity between rural and urban areas. Improved rates help child care programs keep their doors open to serve more families in their communities.

✓ STAFFING

\$36 million annually to expand the Child Care WAGE\$ program statewide.

Children thrive in early education programs when they have stable, reliable relationships with their teachers. WAGE\$ can improve teacher recruitment and retention, stabilize the early education workforce, and support early educators who pursue degrees in early education.

✓ AFFORDABILITY

Continue to fund strategies to stabilize and expand the child care industry, so that all children and families in every county have access to affordable choices for high-quality early learning. This includes ongoing and increased investments for **Smart Start**, **NC Pre-K**, and **Child Care Subsidy Assistance** for working families.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Together, these policies will improve young children’s development and learning, support family economic security, and prepare today’s children for tomorrow’s jobs. In addition, these policies support businesses across the state that depend on their employees having child care in order to work.

Federal relief dollars have been essential in keeping many of our state’s child care programs afloat during the ongoing pandemic, but the child care sector was unstable long before 2020. Only a fraction of eligible children in our state get the benefits of a high-quality early education.

The child care sector needs increased, sustained investments so that early learning programs across the state are there for *all* North Carolina children and families – now and in the future.

Endnotes

¹ Heckman, J. J. (2012). Invest in early childhood development: Reduce deficits, strengthen the economy. *The Heckman Equation*, 7, 1-2. Retrieved from <https://heckmanequation.org/resource/invest-in-early-childhood-development-reduce-deficits-strengthen-the-economy/>

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