

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2021

FILED SENATE
Apr 1, 2021
S.B. 464
PRINCIPAL CLERK

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SENATE BILL DRS35205-LUa-51B

Short Title: Smart Start Funds.

(Public)

Sponsors: Senators Krawiec, Burgin, and Perry (Primary Sponsors).

Referred to:

1 A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
2 AN ACT TO PROMOTE YOUNG CHILDREN'S HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT THROUGH
3 CONTINUED INVESTMENT IN THE NORTH CAROLINA PARTNERSHIP FOR
4 CHILDREN, INC., (SMART START) PROGRAM.

5 Whereas, experiences during early childhood create the foundation for young
6 children's learning, health, and success; and

7 Whereas, children are born ready to learn but may not have access to the experiences
8 or environments that foster healthy brain development, such as engaged child-parent interaction,
9 quality child care, and excellent health care; and

10 Whereas, the COVID-19 pandemic has placed stresses on families that threaten
11 children's healthy growth and development; and

12 Whereas, continued access to affordable, high-quality child care is a critical resource
13 to ensure working parents' ability to participate in the economy as the State recovers from
14 COVID-19; and

15 Whereas, the COVID-19 pandemic has destabilized child care providers due to
16 reduced enrollments and revenues, threatening their long-term sustainability and families' ability
17 to access care; and

18 Whereas, the North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc., (Smart Start) serves
19 children from birth to five years of age and works across the State to raise the quality of child
20 care, strengthen families, advance child health and development, and improve early literacy; and

21 Whereas, Smart Start is a network of 75 nonprofit local partnerships that delivers
22 programs and services for children from birth to five years of age in a consistent, efficient way
23 by achieving strong outcomes that benefit North Carolinians across all 100 counties; and

24 Whereas, Smart Start programs work to support child care providers and early
25 educators so that formal child care settings are high-quality, safe, and staffed by well-trained,
26 well-compensated professionals; and

27 Whereas, Smart Start helps families access home visiting, parenting education, and
28 early literacy programs that ensure children grow and learn in nurturing home environments; and

29 Whereas, Smart Start's health programs promote children's healthy physical and
30 social-emotional development in the early years; and

31 Whereas, Smart Start has been a vital source of guidance and support for families and
32 early childhood professionals in navigating the challenges presented by COVID-19; and

33 Whereas, Smart Start local partnerships use community-based, data-driven decision
34 making to improve the health, well-being, and development of children based on the needs and
35 resources of their local communities; and



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1 Whereas, the Smart Start network is led by the North Carolina Partnership for
2 Children, Inc., (NCPC) that ensures fiscal and programmatic accountability and coordinates the
3 statewide network to create better outcomes for children and families; and

4 Whereas, the Smart Start model includes careful fiscal and programmatic oversight
5 of State-funded services administered through local partnerships, and both data and outcomes are
6 reported to the General Assembly annually; and

7 Whereas, the State's growing population of children aged birth through five years has
8 created additional needs for the programs and services Smart Start provides; and

9 Whereas, a greater State investment in Smart Start can help ensure that more children
10 begin elementary school prepared to succeed and meet the goal of reading at or above grade level
11 by third grade; Now, therefore,

12 The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

13 **SECTION 1.** There is appropriated from the General Fund to the Department of
14 Health and Human Services, Division of Child Development and Early Education, the sum of
15 thirty million dollars (\$30,000,000) recurring for each year of the 2021-2023 fiscal biennium to
16 be allocated to the North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc., (Smart Start) to distribute to
17 Smart Start local partnerships. Funds allocated to the North Carolina Partnership for Children,
18 Inc., pursuant to this section shall be used to provide additional funding for the following Smart
19 Start activities or initiatives:

- 20 (1) \$15,000,000 for child care–related activities.
- 21 (2) \$7,500,000 for family support activities.
- 22 (3) \$3,750,000 for health-related activities.
- 23 (4) \$3,750,000 for child care subsidy.

24 **SECTION 2.** This act becomes effective July 1, 2021.