



**Ensuring School Success for
At-Risk Children in North Carolina
Through High-Quality Pre-Kindergarten**

**More at Four Pre-Kindergarten Program
Progress Report to the North Carolina General Assembly**

May 30, 2005

Overview

More at Four is providing a high-quality pre-kindergarten program for more than 12,000 four-year-olds across North Carolina who are at risk due to poverty and other factors. Without this opportunity, these children would enter kindergarten lagging behind their peers. More at Four prepares these children to succeed in school.

According to the National Institute for Early Education Research, More at Four is one of the four highest-quality pre-kindergarten programs nationally. More at Four offers:

- well-educated teachers
- small class size and low teacher-child ratios
- research-based curricula
- focus on the whole child and family

In More at Four pre-kindergarten classrooms, children:

- learn about letters, colors, shapes and numbers;
- engage in active learning, through child-initiated and teacher-initiated play and activities;
- develop a positive sense of self and an enthusiasm for learning;
- listen to stories and learn about books;
- explore math, science, music and art; and
- learn to develop positive relationships with peers and teachers.

Joshua entered our More at Four pre-kindergarten program with a severe behavioral problem, unable to function socially with his peers. He also has developmental delays that were undiagnosed, so he was not receiving any services. Through More at Four, he has developed socially and emotionally. He now interacts with his peers and maintains a friendship. He is now receiving speech and developmental therapy. Due to More at Four, this child has shown growth in several areas.

-- More at Four Pre-K Teacher

When James first came to our center enrolling in More at Four, it was his first preschool experience. He was very timid, kept to himself and cried most of the day. He did not know the alphabet, colors, shapes, or numbers. He did not know how to socialize with his peers. Developmentally, he rated very poorly in the physical, language, cognitive and social/emotional domains.

We had to start from the beginning with James. We worked one-on-one, each day, with him. Now, we are excited to report that James has not only grown academically, but his social and emotional skills are outstanding. Before, he kept to himself; he now has made several positive friendships in the class. He is always smiling! He now knows all the shapes, colors and most of the alphabet and numbers.

We encourage James's mother to work with him at home and to keep encouraging him to succeed in school. We hope James takes the foundation he has received at this school and builds a great future for himself!

-- Child Care Center Director

Evaluation outcomes for More at Four after its first three years show that the program is successful

When Eva began More at Four, she was very limited in her English language. Although I had spoken to her in English and Spanish her entire life, her English language was nowhere near her Spanish language.

Thanks to her teacher and the other teachers! I have seen Eva progress in her oral language. It has been a positive experience for her and us.

We are very proud of her progress. Now, she will enter kindergarten without a disadvantage. She will be able to learn like the other students.

I'm really glad this program is offered because it has eased all my worries!

-- Eva's Mother

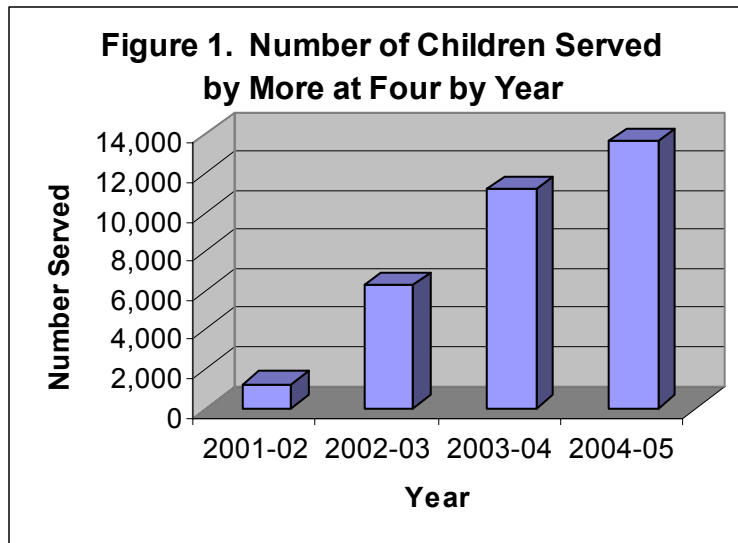
- Children in More at Four pre-kindergarten programs demonstrated significant growth related to kindergarten readiness in all outcome areas measured: language and literacy skills, math skills, general knowledge, and behavioral skills.
- The strongest effects of the More at Four program in language and literacy skills were for those children who entered the program with the greatest needs.
- Results for the More at Four program were equal to or better than the performance of other more established large-scale pre-kindergarten programs, both in terms of program quality and child outcomes.

High-quality pre-kindergarten programs like More at Four substantially increase children's chances for success in school and in life, as evidenced by the best research nationally on pre-kindergarten. And, there are substantial economic benefits from investments in early education. According to the National Institute for Early Education Research, the research shows:

- increased student achievement
- reduced grade repetition and special education
- increased educational attainment
- increased employment, productivity and earnings
- less welfare dependency
- reduced crime and delinquency

More at Four serves at-risk four-year-olds statewide, with a priority on those unserved

More at Four has served 13,623 children in SFY 2004-05, as of May 16, 2005. Children are served in all 100 counties.



Children served have factors that put them at risk of school failure. Family income is the primary risk factor. Children in families with annual incomes at or below 75 percent of the state median income are eligible for More at Four. Other risk factors include limited English proficiency, disability, chronic health condition and developmental/educational need.

More at Four's goal is to first reach those at-risk four-year-olds who are unserved. Among the children served in SFY 2004-05, as of May 16:

- 78.4 percent were unserved when enrolled in More at Four
- 60.6 percent had never been served in any preschool or child care setting

Local programs use a variety of strategies to find and recruit eligible children

More at Four contractors reported that the most commonly used strategies for the 2004-05 school year were:¹

- Word of mouth among parents (82.4 percent of respondents)

¹ This survey of local More at Four contractors had a 99 percent response rate.

- Flyers/brochures and information to families through elementary school children (each 81.3 percent)
- Coordination with social services and/or health and mental health agencies (79.1 percent)
- Coordination with the public schools (75.8 percent)
- Newspapers (72.5 percent)
- Coordination with Head Start (67 percent)
- Information sent to area agencies (64.8 percent)
- Coordination with other child care agencies (63.7 percent)
- Single, county-wide recruitment, screening and/or registration process (48.4 percent)

Among these strategies, contractors indicated that the most effective were:

- Word of mouth among parents (42.9 percent of respondents)
- Coordination with the public schools (37.4 percent)
- Flyers/brochures (36.3 percent)
- Newspapers and information to families through elementary school children (each 31.9 percent)
- Coordination with social services and/or health and mental health agencies (30.8 percent)
- Single, county-wide recruitment, screening and/or registration process (27.5 percent)
- Coordination with Head Start (22 percent)

In addition, half of the respondents indicated that they target special populations, such as Hispanic/Latino families or a specific geographical area in the community. Strategies include advertising through Hispanic newspapers and radio stations, working with Hispanic churches, and working with bilingual staff in community agencies, such as police and health departments.

Sam and his brother had just been given to his grandparents to care for. His father was in prison. His mother could not handle raising the two boys.

Sam responded to very little and could not speak clearly. He had rotten teeth across the front of his mouth. The grandparents brought Sam to a dentist to work on the condition of his mouth and called us about enrolling Sam in More at Four just before Thanksgiving.

Sam came to us with a glazed look in his eyes, very little movement, and did not know what to do when a plate of food was placed in front of him.

I visited Sam's class after the new year and had to be told which child was Sam. He had actually come up to the teacher as we were talking and asked her for the best magnifier to see the items she had placed on the tray for the letter B. I was floored. This could not be Sam!

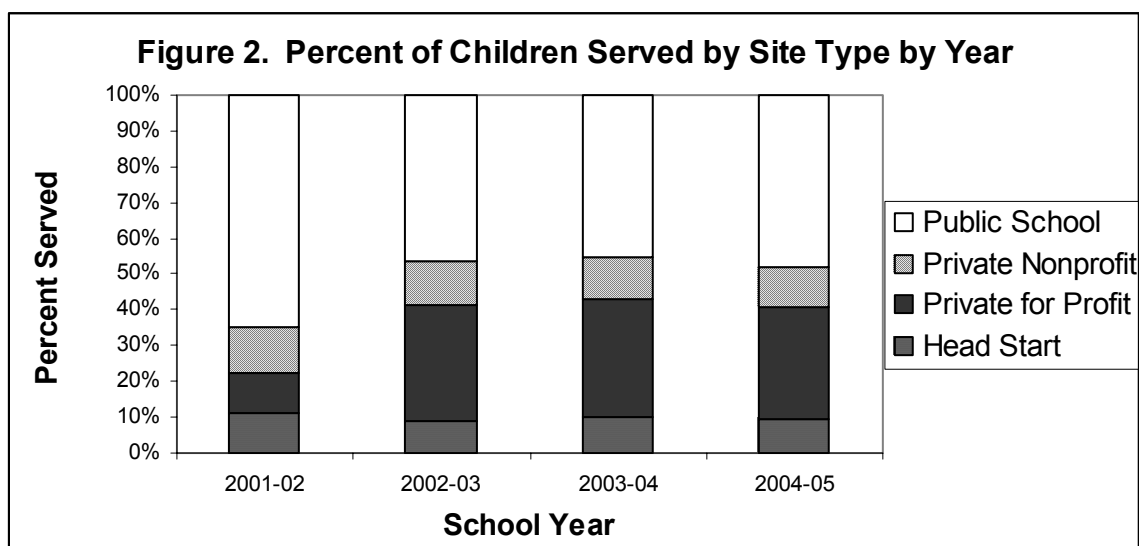
He had a sweet smile, was discussing items with another child and acting as if he had been in the classroom forever. The teacher told me he was eating by himself and enjoying the variety of meals. His grandparents are so happy we could help them!

-- More at Four Contract Administrator,
Public School System

More at Four builds on and enhances our state's existing early care and education system

More at Four fosters coordination within North Carolina's early care and education system. Communities develop collaborative plans for implementing More at Four classrooms locally, with shared leadership from Smart Start and the public schools and broad representation from early childhood service providers. At the state and local levels, More at Four works closely with Smart Start, the public schools, Head Start, licensed child care providers, the Division of Child Development, services for children with disabilities ages birth to five, and other relevant programs to create a more coordinated system of early care and education services.

Local communities implement More at Four pre-kindergarten classrooms in a variety of sites, including public schools, licensed for-profit and nonprofit child care centers, and Head Start programs, according to locally determined needs and resources.



Kayla is developmentally delayed and receives speech services once a week. She also has a physical disability. When she came to my class, she would not talk at all, not even to tell me she had to use the bathroom. She did not participate in group activities.

Now close to the end of the year, I see many positive changes in Kayla. She sings all the songs and answers questions during circle time. She plays and interacts with many children. Her fine motor skills are getting better, but it is still difficult for her to hold a pencil. She is choosing to go the manipulatives center more, so this should help her with her fine motor skills.

She has also grown leaps and bounds in her cognitive development. At the beginning of the year, she could not recognize many letters or numbers. Recently, she recognized all 26 letters and her numbers 0-9 out of order without any hesitation. I am amazed how much pre-kindergarten has helped this child progress and look forward to seeing how much she will progress in kindergarten.

-- More at Four Pre-K Teacher

More at Four's current budget is \$51.2 million, with local communities contributing more than \$32 million additional

Over 91 percent of state appropriations for More at Four provide for classroom operations. The average operating cost per slot is \$3,704 per year. At the local level, communities contribute other resources to support the full cost of serving children in a high-quality program. More at Four state funds also help enhance teacher quality, through scholarships and professional development.

Table I. More at Four Budget for SFY 2004-05, as of May 16, 2005²

Budget Category	Budgeted Amount	% of Total
Classroom Start-Up (one-time allocation)	1,783,984	3.5%
Classroom Operations	45,073,410	88.1%
Subtotal - Classroom Funds	46,857,394	91.6%
T.E.A.C.H.® Scholarships	1,029,640	2.0%
Professional Development	946,934	1.9%
External Evaluation and Database	772,876	1.5%
Administrative Costs	1,519,070	3.0%
Transferred to Subsidy ³	26,520	-----
Total Budget	\$51,152,434	100%

**Table II. Other Resources Supporting More at Four at the Local Level
Projected for SFY 2004-05, as reported as of May 16, 2005⁴**

Type of Funds	Projected Amount	% of Total
Smart Start ⁵	10,585,248	33.1%
Pre-School Disabilities	8,158,703	25.5%
Subsidy	4,854,533	15.2%
Head Start	2,399,892	7.5%
Title I	1,333,168	4.2%
City/County Appropriations	821,823	2.6%
Other	3,869,750	12.1%
Total	\$ 32,023,117	100%

² Actual expenditures are unknown until the end of the state fiscal year.

³ Legislation requires that any funds for slots unfilled by 1/30/05 shall be transferred to child care subsidy.

⁴ Actual expenditures of other resources accessed at the local level are unknown until the end of the state fiscal year.

⁵ Other resources accessed from Smart Start in SFY 2004-05 represent the budgeted amounts as reported by More at Four contractors. Smart Start budgeted contributions may also be reported under subsidy.

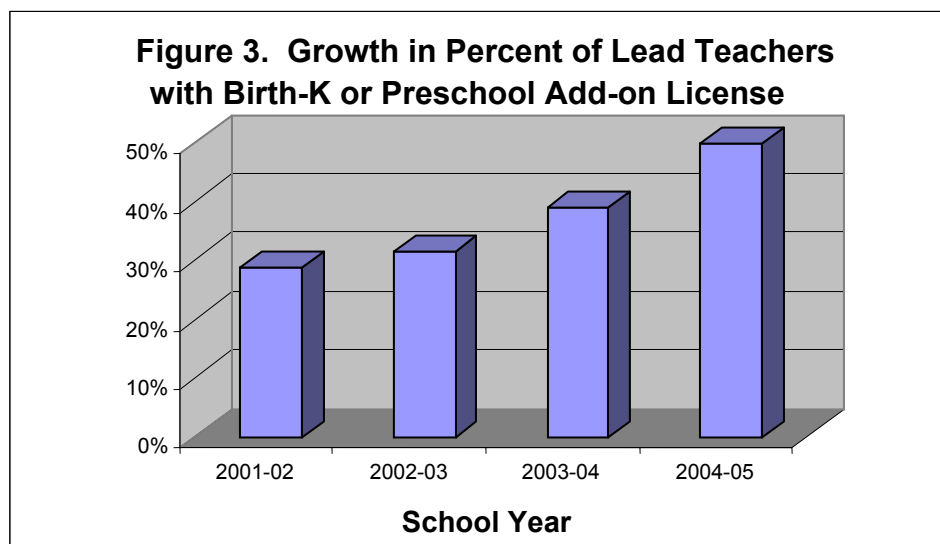
More at Four is a leader in high-quality standards

More at Four meets nine of the ten quality benchmarks for pre-kindergarten defined by the National Institute for Early Education Research, making the program one of the four highest-quality pre-kindergarten programs nationally. These benchmarks include teacher and teacher assistant education and training requirements, maximum class size, teacher-child ratio, and other critical quality components.

More at Four promotes teacher quality

Since teacher quality is a key component of high-quality pre-kindergarten, More at Four sets high teacher standards and supports programs in improving teacher education and credentials.

More at Four standards require lead teachers to hold Birth-Kindergarten (B-K) or Preschool Add-on licensure. The More at Four state office gives programs provisional approval for four years for classrooms with a lead teacher who does not meet the standard. During the provisional approval period, teachers are encouraged and supported in continuing their education to obtain the appropriate licensure. Approximately 50 percent currently meet the standard by holding the B-K or Preschool Add-on licensure. Furthermore, approximately 84 percent hold a bachelor's degree or higher of some type.



The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Project/More at Four collaboration helps lead teachers and teacher assistants work toward their professional development goals and comply with the *More at Four* teacher education and credential standards. In SFY 2004-05, this collaboration provided 246 scholarships to teachers working in *More at Four* pre-kindergarten classrooms in 52 counties. Through this program, More at Four also supported health insurance for 193 teachers in 82 different centers in 38 counties. In addition, 57 scholarships were awarded to college and university students preparing to work in More at Four pre-kindergarten classrooms.

More at Four promotes ongoing quality improvement through professional development and technical assistance for local programs

The More at Four state office provides multiple professional development opportunities for local More at Four teachers and administrators statewide. A statewide conference is offered annually in the fall in collaboration with the NC Association for the Education of Young Children. This year's conference had 1,009 attendees from More at Four programs.

In addition to the conference, the More at Four state office provided professional development sessions in various locations across the state. This year's topics included: implementing *Foundations: Early Learning Standards for North Carolina Preschoolers*, literacy in the pre-kindergarten classroom, implementation of curricula, emotional-social development of young children, facilitating learning and development in outdoor environments, and classroom activities that support the growth and development of young children.

The More at Four state office also provides significant ongoing technical assistance for local programs aimed at enhancing program quality. The technical assistance is focused, in particular, on classroom environments and implementing best teaching practices.

I have worked as a pre-kindergarten teacher assistant for five years. While working with young children, I have developed a fascination and curiosity with how they grow, learn and develop. I love playing with children and helping them to develop a special love for learning and exploring.

I decided to go to school and take some basic classes that would help me learn more about this age group. I completed basic courses at my local community college and then enrolled at a local college in the early childhood education program. I will complete my final class in June and participate in the graduation ceremony in December. I want to continue my education to obtain my B-K license and become a classroom teacher.

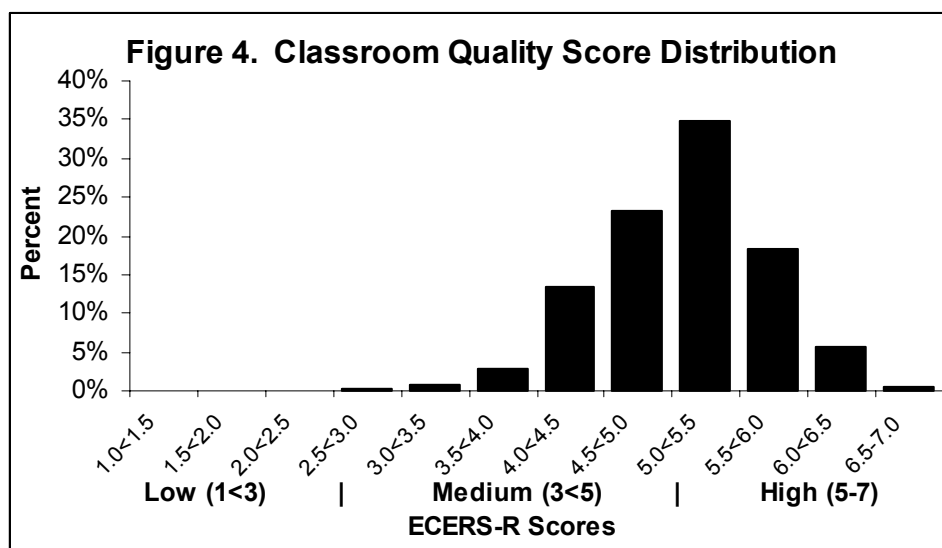
I am also Hispanic/Spanish speaking. I have realized that with the influx of the Hispanic population in North Carolina, there is a need for more Spanish-speaking administrators and teachers to help these families and bridge the communication gaps that exist among various cultures.

-- More at Four Pre-K Teacher Assistant

More at Four promotes effective pre-kindergarten learning environments

The learning environment is another key component of high-quality pre-kindergarten. The quality of classroom practices, including the activities and materials, the interactions among teachers and children, the physical environment, and the daily organization of the program is measured by the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale -Revised (ECERS-R).

More at Four standards require programs to receive an ECERS-R evaluation and to score a 4.5 or higher on the ECERS-R quality scale. Predominantly, More at Four classrooms are providing learning environments that meet or exceed the standard, with most in the highest-quality range. Programs that do not meet this standard develop enhancement plans and receive intensive technical assistance.



When Jasmine first started the More at Four program, she was a little girl who did not like to be away from family. Now, she loves to go to school to see her teachers and friends. She has learned to play with others. She has also learned words, colors and some writing.

She has also encouraged me to do better at work, school and as her mother. When she was born, I was a high school drop-out, but over the years she has taught me that I needed to be a better person and I needed to do things that I want her to do, like go to college.

-- Jasmine's Mother

Expanding high-quality pre-kindergarten opportunities

To achieve North Carolina's school readiness goals, we must continue to build on the existing system to ensure *voluntary*, high-quality pre-kindergarten education for all of our state's preschool children. This vision requires expanding More at Four toward the goal of serving all at-risk four-year-olds, as well as promoting high-quality services for all preschool children.

When Isabel first entered our More at Four classroom, she only communicated by whispering in Spanish and gesturing when she wanted or needed something.

Isabel has made real progress both socially and developmentally. She is able to speak and understand English. She very rarely points and gestures and, instead, uses "her words" to communicate. She doesn't whisper as much and, at times, we have even had to ask her to use her inside voice!

She loves learning and her favorite thing to talk about is our class pet (a hamster named Smiley) whom she was very proud to take home and care for over the weekend.

-- More at Four Pre-K Teacher

To move the state toward this vision, More at Four, Smart Start, the Division of Child Development, the Department of Public Instruction, Early Intervention, Head Start State Collaboration Office, FPG Child Development Institute and Child Care Services Association are developing proposed *North Carolina Pre-Kindergarten Program Standards* and providing the opportunity for review and feedback among stakeholders.

A state-defined set of high-quality pre-kindergarten program standards for North Carolina will clarify our vision for pre-kindergarten education and create a common language across programs. Promoting uniform program standards across all early childhood care and education programs will help end disparities in the quality of pre-kindergarten available to children statewide, regardless of location, setting or auspice. It will also help ensure the greatest accountability for public funds, because it is a goal that, eventually, public funds will be invested only in programs that meet state standards. These pre-kindergarten program standards are complementary to and

facilitate the *North Carolina Early Learning Standards*, which define widely held expectations for the learning and development of preschool children.

A proposal for implementing *North Carolina Pre-Kindergarten Program Standards* is under development. Implementation is proposed to begin in the 2005-06 school year. Programs with classrooms serving four-year-olds that meet the state pre-kindergarten program standards would be given the opportunity to apply for special state recognition for those classrooms. Participation by local programs would be voluntary, except for More at Four classrooms.

A smart investment for progress in education

With over four years of investment in a state-funded pre-kindergarten program for at-risk four-year-olds, the program is proving successful. Yet, challenges remain for the program's future. With the state funding only approximately half of the full cost of a high-quality pre-kindergarten program, local communities are facing increasing funding challenges as local resources available to support the rest of the costs of the program are dwindling or needed for other purposes. Local communities also are challenged by the need for more classroom space for pre-kindergarten and the need for transportation.

Despite these challenges, More at Four has grown over four years to serve increasingly more children and is effectively reaching its target at-risk population. By providing a nationally recognized high-quality pre-kindergarten program, More at Four is enabling these at-risk children to achieve significant growth over the school year in language and literacy skills, math skills, general knowledge and behavioral skills — skills that prepare them to do well in kindergarten. These children would enter kindergarten at a significant disadvantage compared to their peers without this opportunity.

More at Four, SFY 2004-05				Sources of Other Resources					
Contractor	# of slots	# children served	Subsidy	Title I	Smart Start	Preschool Disabil.	Local Appro.	Head Start	Other
Alamance-Burlington School System	135	147		X	X	X			X
Alexander County Partnership for Children	40	43	X		X	X		X	X
Alleghany County Schools	43	49		X	X	X			
Anson County Partnership for Children	81	89		X	X			X	X
Ashe County School System	46	51	X	X		X	X	X	X
Avery County Public Schools	76	87		X		X			
Beaufort/Hyde Partnership for Children	106	116			X			X	X
Bertie County Schools	53	57		X				X	
Bladen County Schools	62	72		X			X		
Brunswick County Partnership for Children	79	93			X				
Buncombe County Partnership for Children	95	114	X	X	X	X		X	X
Burke County Partnership for Children	222	251	X		X	X	X	X	X
Cabarrus County Partnership for Children	199	227	X	X	X			X	X
Caldwell County Smart Start	49	52			X			X	X
Northeastern Community Development Corporation (Camden)	18	18	X					X	X
Carteret County Schools	123	136		X	X	X		X	X
Caswell County Schools	54	55		X			X		
Catawba County Partnership for Children	162	177		X	X	X	X		X
Chatham County Partnership for Children	51	56			X			X	
Edenton-Chowan Board of Education	24	24						X	
Cleveland County Partnership for Children	131	143			X				
Columbus County Schools	108	116						X	X
Craven County Board of Education	90	97		X	X		X	X	X
Cumberland County Partnership for Children	536	622			X			X	X
Currituck County Schools	18	18						X	
Dare County Schools	18	19		X			X	X	X
Davidson County Partnership for Children	234	260	X	X		X	X	X	X
Davie County Schools	75	84		X		X	X		X
Duplin County Schools	86	90		X	X	X	X	X	
Durham's Partnership for Children	291	320			X				X
Smart Start of Forsyth County, Inc.	304	341		X	X			X	
Franklin/Granville/Vance Partnership	18	21			X				
Gaston County Schools	292	329	X	X	X			X	X
Gates County Board of Education	14	15		X		X	X		
Granville County Schools	30	34			X		X	X	
Guilford County Partnership for Children, Inc.	707	812	X	X				X	
Halifax Warren SmartStart Partnership for Children	145	156			X			X	
Harnett County Partnership for Children	148	192			X				X
Henderson County Partnership for Children	70	89	X		X			X	X
Hertford County Public Schools	99	107		X	X	X		X	X
Hoke County Schools	111	129		X	X		X	X	
Hyde County Schools	15	15		X		X		X	
Iredell County Partnership for Young Children	160	177			X		X		X
Partnership for Children of Johnston County	216	245			X				
Jones County Partnership for Children	35	39		X	X	X		X	
Lee County Partnership for Children	106	125			X				

More at Four, SFY 2004-05 (cont.)			Sources of Other Resources						
Contractor	# of slots	# children served	Subsidy	Title I	Smart Start	Preschool Disabil.	Local Appro.	Head Start	Other
Lenoir-Greene Partnership for Children	193	207			X				
Partnership for Children of Lincoln & Gaston Co.	90	98							X
Community Action Opportunities (Madison County)	18	22						X	
Martin County Schools	31	33		X		X		X	
McDowell County Schools	54	61		X		X		X	
Mecklenburg Partnership for Children	1,057	1,160		X	X			X	X
Intermountain Children's Services (Mitchell County)	41	48							X
Montgomery County Partnership for Children	166	182			X			X	
Moore County Schools	30	35			X				
Down East Partnership for Children (Nash/Edgecombe)	197	222	X		X		X		
New Hanover County Schools	288	318			X			X	X
Northampton County Schools	45	46		X			X		X
Onslow	52	62		X		X		X	
Orange County Partnership for Young Children	120	135	X		X	X		X	X
Pamlico County Schools	34	40				X		X	
Elizabeth City-Pasquotank Public Schools	66	76		X					
Pender County Schools	84	96			X			X	X
Perquimans County Schools	40	41		X		X		X	X
Person County Partnership for Children	34	36		X	X				
Pitt County Public Schools	218	241		X		X		X	X
Polk County Schools	76	82		X				X	
Randolph County Partnership for Children	173	188		X	X			X	X
Region A Partnership for Children (Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Jackson, Macon, Swain Counties)	243	265	X	X		X	X	X	
Richmond County Schools	106	118			X	X	X	X	X
Public Schools of Robeson County	445	518	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Rockingham County Partnership for Children, Inc.	164	188	X		X			X	X
Rowan Partnership for Children	126	144			X			X	X
Rutherford County Schools	139	147		X				X	X
Sampson County Partnership for Children	139	162			X			X	
Scotland County Schools	87	96						X	X
Stanly County School System	70	77		X		X			
Stokes Partnership for Children, Inc.	63	70		X	X	X		X	X
Surry County Early Childhood Partnership, Inc.	96	110	X	X	X		X	X	X
Smart Start of Transylvania County	30	31		X	X	X		X	
Tyrrell County Schools	18	19			X	X	X		
Union County Public Schools	205	229	X		X		X	X	X
Vance County Schools	36	37		X	X			X	
Wake County SmartStart	528	584		X	X	X			
Washington County Schools	69	70		X	X	X		X	
Watauga County Schools	53	59		X	X		X	X	X
Wayne County Partnership for Children, Inc.	410	486	X		X			X	X
Wilkes County Schools	88	92			X			X	X
Wilson County Partnership for Children	90	99			X				X
Yadkin County Partnership for Children	69	73			X			X	X
Region D Child Care, Inc. (Yancey County)	11	12	X						X
TOTAL	12,167	13,623	-	-	-	-	-	-	-