

## Summary

Just like roads or bridges, early childhood education is an essential part of our modern communities. The stability and availability of early education makes everyone in our schools and workplaces, safer, healthier, and more self-sufficient. We have made decisions and invested resources in early childhood education in the past and we are proud of that progress. However, just like roads and bridges, updates need to be made to this critical program that grows stronger families in NC.

## What's Working in NC

- North Carolina's collaborative approach to Early Childhood Education is a common sense strategy that aligns child development experts with community agencies so that children in our schools are safer and healthier now and in the future. Specialist and non-specialists work together to ensure that evidence based strategies and best practices are embedded in our programs.
- Flexibility at the local level ensures that realistic programs are best suited to the needs of individual counties in a diverse state like North Carolina. The ability to make these decisions locally, makes the most of our collective ability to be practical and effective throughout the State.
- "Quality and Quantity" discussions are robust in NC and provide for thoughtful planning and responsible use of NC's limited resources. During the year, there are times when Buncombe County can have anywhere from 0 children to 1,200 children waiting to receive subsidized child care services, depending on allocations, reversions or reallocations. Children served are part of a high priority population, where many have experienced trauma and the stability of their placement is critical

## What We Can Improve in NC

- The allocation formula for funding for the Subsidized Child Care Program is nearly impossible to use and makes it hard to project costs and track spending. Variables in the formula such as census data, population growth, historical data, and changes in the county market rate formula –demand constant evaluation.
- The County Market Rate Reimbursement Policies are not feasible for a geographically & economically diverse state like North Carolina. The cost of care varies widely across the state. A sensible solution would be to develop an alternative methodology for reimbursement rates that offers fair rates to all providers.
- The strength, stability & availability of public structures, such as early childhood education, raise the quality of life for everyone in NC. An investment in this important program is needed to prepare children for school and help parents get back to work. Funding cannot be taken from other mandated services as it has been done in the past. When the recession began in Dec, 2009, NC was investing \$97,754,368 annually, in the subsidized child care program compared to the current investment of \$47,585,408. During this time, the number of children that qualify for subsidized childcare (0 - 8 years old) have increased, from 48% to 53%.

## We have an opportunity to make common sense improvements to this critical program that helps to nurture growing brains and strengthen families. Suggested improvements include:

- The re-authorization of CCDBG, (first time in 19 years) offers many options for NC to make some positive changes to our Child Care Subsidy Program such as eligibility changes and the opportunity to develop new methodology for the county market rate system.
- Streamlining the eligibility process by aligning policies with other programs such as FNS and Medicaid
- Funding and Allocation policies demand the importance of timely and consistent funding for families without them sitting on a waitlist. A unified portal of entry into the variety of early childhood programs, can ensure maximum usage of available resources to more efficiently serve all eligible children.

