

EARLY EDUCATION AND FAMILY SUPPORT SUBCOMMITTEE

TESTIMONY SUMMARY
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The Down East Partnership for Children's (DEPC) mission is to launch every child in Nash and Edgecombe counties as a healthy, lifelong learner by the end of third grade. To accomplish this, DEPC is committed to the four building blocks of early literacy and learning: healthy growth and development starting before birth; engaged families and coordinated communities; high quality early care before kindergarten and effective learning environments for all K-3 students, both inside and outside the classroom, 365 days a year. Focusing on these goals ensures that all children, ages 0-8 are nurtured within their families, have access to quality early care and education, and transition into a school where they can have a successful experience. Our annual operating budget comes from diverse sources, including local, state and federal government, as well as multiple private foundations, businesses and individuals. We administer both NCPK and Smart Start funding for Nash and Edgecombe counties.

Testimony will focus on the strengths and challenges in 3 areas:

- **Smart Start Subsidy.** DEPC's Smart Start Scholarships are provided to the most at-risk 0-3 year old children in our community, through a network of the highest quality child care providers in our community, and are bundled with parent education as a requirement of program participation. Our scholarship program has been a quality driver for the entire early education system in our counties, as each year the Smart Start planning process has enabled us to raise standards and integrate innovations, which have eventually have been adopted state-wide. Raising the Smart Start subsidy requirement from the original 30% to now above 40% limits our ability to fund other essential building blocks of early learning and provide support for families who children are not in child care.
- **Leveraging and Aligning Local Resources.** Head Start, Title I and II of Every Child Succeeds, NCPK, DSS Subsidy, and Smart Start all work together to fund our two county early education system and serve the maximum number of children. This integrated approach is coordinated by DEPC's community-wide strategic plan, which includes shared benchmarks and outcomes. This approach has consistently allowed us to leverage additional resources (cash and in-kind) from both the private and the public sectors, including partners like Cummins Rocky Mount Engine Company, PNC, Blue Cross Blue Shield, USDA, and the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust, to work on strategies such as building shared outdoor learning environments on public school playgrounds. Shared outcomes and alignment of strategies at the state level are needed.
- **0-8 System and Transition.** Our Partnership has always worked across the kindergarten divide because 0-8 is a unique developmental period. Research shows that proficiency in reading by the end of third grade enables students to shift from learning to read to reading to learn. Smart Start funds are used to support transition coordinators in both school districts, provide coaching to school community teams on transition issues, work with NCPK providers to develop transition plans for all students, and educate parents on the importance of smooth transitions to their child's success in kindergarten and beyond. Resources for summer learning and after school enrichment are currently gaps in both our local and state early education systems.