



EACH CHILD. EVERY COMMUNITY.

*Annual Report to
The North Carolina General Assembly
for Fiscal Year 2022-2023*

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Introduction



Dear Members of the North Carolina General Assembly:

It is my pleasure to provide the 2022- 2023 Annual Report of The North Carolina Partnership for Children (NCPC) and Smart Start, in response to G.S. 143B-168.12(d).

With NCGA's sustained investments, Smart Start continued to help North Carolina's youngest children arrive at kindergarten healthy and ready to learn. Smart Start Local Partnerships supported children and their families through innovation, flexibility, and collaboration, leveraging state support and local resources to support communities. At the state level, NCPC created change through critical support to Local Partnerships.

Partnerships connected families to resources such as diaper banks and early literacy programs, provided core administrative support for NC Pre-K and child care subsidy, and collaborated with other organizations to implement evidence-based and evidence-informed services. Local Partnerships are leaders within communities—establishing unique solutions to the child care workforce crisis and building out system-level structures to support children. These are just a few of the ways they serve communities and are indispensable hubs for families.

At the state level NCPC focused on our own infrastructure, updating Smart Start's Needs Formula and creating an evidence-based and evidence-informed data dashboard, Smart Start Community Indicators, for Partnerships to use when assessing communities' needs. These changes enable Smart Start to support children and families more consistently and responsively statewide.

In this annual report, we share how Smart Start moves the needle on a host of activities related to positive child outcomes. For example, this year, Smart Start supported an increase in quality in 28% of all child care programs statewide. We hope you enjoy learning about the outstanding work our Network is doing statewide and encourage you to reach out with any questions.

Smart Start is a critical part of North Carolina's early childhood system. We are laser-focused on helping young children become successful at school, within communities, and in our future workforce. NCPC and the Smart Start Network are deeply grateful for your support and will continue to invest in positive outcomes for our state's youngest.

In partnership,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Amy Stephens Cabbage".

Amy Stephens Cabbage,
President, The North Carolina Partnership for Children/Smart Start

The North Carolina Partnership for Children

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The Smart Start Network

Smart Start is a Network of 75 nonprofit partnerships serving all 100 North Carolina counties. The Network is led by The North Carolina Partnership for Children (NCPC), which ensures fiscal and programmatic accountability and comprehensive, long-range strategic planning for the statewide Network to create better outcomes for children and families.

Smart Start works across the state to increase access to quality early care and education, collaborate with families to reach their goals, improve child health and development, and support early literacy for children birth-to-five. The Network also works statewide to provide vital workforce supports as well as critical system-level supports. The Smart Start Network administers state, federal, local, and private programs and services, such as NC Pre-K, child care subsidy, and Head Start, serving as North Carolina's system for early childhood health, development, and learning.

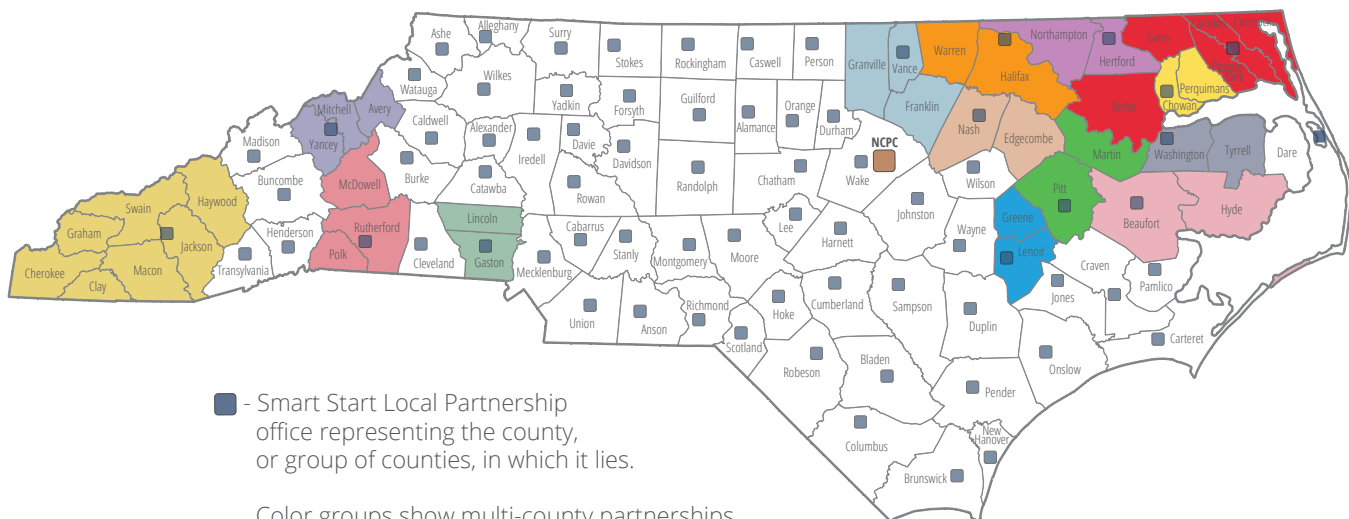
Smart Start brings communities together — parents, early learning and health

professionals, faith-based leaders, educators, business leaders, and elected officials—to coordinate services and address service gaps to support children.

The Network provides tools and resources to fully engage young children in learning opportunities, so they can grow to be healthy, productive, and well-rounded students, parents, workers, and leaders. This support is crucial as many children do not have access to the experiences or environments that foster healthy brain development, such as supportive child-parent interactions, effective early education, and health care.

Smart Start's structure provides statewide governance and room for innovation with local flexibility. Each Local Partnership is supported by NCPC, and through the collective power of the Network, each is better equipped to support children, their families, and the professionals and community members that collectively support each child.

The Smart Start Network generates long-term change for children and the adults in their lives by ensuring coordinated implementation of NC's vision for early childhood experiences.



How It Works

NCPC Supports Smart Start Local Partnerships

At the state level, NCPC supports data-driven decision-making and holds accountability for the entire Network, ensuring state investments are producing strong outcomes for children and families. NCPC provides Local Partnerships with evidence on program outcomes to support informed budget choices that produce results. In addition, continuous fiscal and quality monitoring ensures effectiveness and promotes innovation. These activities include:

- Training partnership board members and staff on fiduciary oversight, protecting accountability in financial processes from budget oversight to contract management
- Monitoring partnerships to ensure compliance with state and federal laws, legislative mandates, and state policies
- Supporting centralized accounting and contracting that promote efficiency
- Helping partnerships in selection and implementation of evidence-based and evidence-informed programs to achieve the positive outcomes for children
- Reviewing programs at the local level to ensure services target and address unique community needs
- Facilitating the sharing of resources, innovative ideas, and solutions across the Smart Start Network so that individual counties benefit from collective knowledge
- Maintaining a centralized portal for collection of programmatic data including children served and outcomes for each activity
- Providing county-level measures of child well-being collected from state agencies to inform community planning
- Providing and organizing shared services for the Network which supports programming, administration, data collection, and daily operations

Smart Start Local Partnerships Create Community Impact

Smart Start Local Partnerships have the flexibility and the data to determine how to improve the health, well-being, and development of children based on the needs and resources locally. Local Partnerships use a combination of state, federal, local, and private funds to provide comprehensive services and programs that support and strengthen early development by:

- Working with community organizations to improve coordination and alignment of services for children and families
- Ensuring early education is high quality, child-focused, family-friendly, and more easily accessible to families
- Providing financial assistance to help families access early education
- Supporting the increase in compensation of the early childhood workforce, particularly child care providers and teachers
- Supporting the local infrastructure of NC Pre-K with financial resources and training
- Advancing child health and development through partnerships with early care and education programs and medical practices
- Supporting families with programs that improve parenting skills and encourage family engagement in children's development and education
- Promoting early literacy with programs that assist parents, teachers, and medical providers

Highlights from 2022-2023

Smart Start creates critical impacts by:

- Designing *Smart Start Community Indicators*, a dashboard providing data on early childhood indicators at the county, Local Partnership, and census-tract level to support birth-to-five investments
- Creating *Smart Solutions: Effective Birth-to-Five Investments*, a searchable catalog of state evidence-based and evidence-informed programming, interventions, and strategies, that support young children prenatal-through-age five, their teachers, caregivers, and communities
- Implementing Family Connects Pilots in eight rural counties as part of NCPC's work through the Preschool Development Grant (PDG) B-5
- Supporting family engagement and leadership coalitions in 14 Local Partnerships across the state to lift up family voice as part of NCPC's work through PDG B-5
- Investing in a series of projects to increase Smart Start capacity for leadership, supporting leadership development tools, creating opportunities for Smart Start Network-wide learning, strengthening data systems, and streamlining contracting as part of a multi-year grant from the Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation
- Convening and offering support to local coalitions to address adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) as part of the NC Healthy and Resilient Communities Initiative which works to build resilience across the state
- Creating the *Healthy & Resilient Communities Dashboard* with 8 new resilience indicators within Smart Start Community Indicators with the goal of supporting planning and decision making for resilience statewide
- Championing the Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act (CMWRA) to fund coordinators at the local-level, building resilience skills for a community-led response when climate disasters occur
- Working to promote racial equity in the state's early childhood system, with a workgroup of Smart Start Network staff focusing on reducing racial disparities in programs, services, and outcomes, including the reduction of preschool expulsions.

Funding

Smart Start is a national model of a successful public-private partnership. Public funding creates infrastructure that allows private dollars to flow to each county quickly and efficiently, delivering significant impact to children and families.

In the 2022-2023 fiscal year, Local Partnership expenditures of state Smart Start funds totaled \$150.7 million. Of this \$150.7 million, \$65.4 million was spent on subsidy; \$39.7 million towards early care and education expenses such as child care, teacher technical assistance, and professional development supplements; and \$22.4 million on family support programs and strategies.

NCPC spent \$7.17 million. Of this amount, NCPC managed \$1.79 million to help Local Partnerships build capacity, and to meet legislative requirements. This includes fiscal

accountability, Local Partnership audits, and Local Partnership capacity building activities. NCPC's remaining \$5.39 million expenses were for operating expenses to ensure that Smart Start met all legislatively mandated requirements while operating to the highest standards of fiscal and programmatic integrity.

Federal, local, and private funders have invested millions of dollars in Smart Start to support children and families. In the 2022-2023 fiscal year, NCPC and Smart Start Local Partnerships leveraged an additional \$56.8 million for the state's young children, including \$48.4 million in cash contributions and \$8.4 million from in-kind contributions.

See Charts and Tables on page 26

Ensuring a Strong Foundation for Early Care and Education

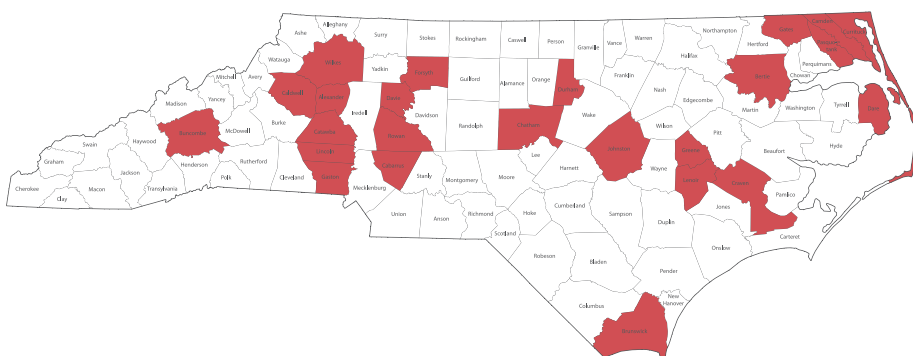
Smart Start improves the quality of early learning practices and environments for children by offering professional development, technical assistance, and other support to teachers and directors. In North Carolina, licensed child care centers and homes have star ratings between 1 and 5 stars, with 5 stars being the highest. During the pandemic, the Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) paused assessments for star ratings due to safety concerns, and in 2022-2023, many centers and homes have not yet received a star level assessment.

The Smart Start Network continues to improve the landscape of early care and education in the pandemic's aftermath regardless of these delays in assessments. In the past year, 1,654 child care facilities or 28% of all North Carolina's facilities participated in Smart Start technical assistance to improve child care quality.

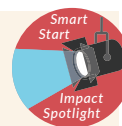
1,102 child care facilities received teacher support in the form of technical assistance, mentoring, and education to increase star ratings.

The Smart Start Network found innovative ways to continue to support providers as the state recovers from the pandemic. Local Partnerships helped providers access needed supplies and stay up-to-date on health and safety regulations. The Network also provided support for providers seeking financial assistance.

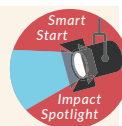
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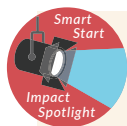
Albemarle Alliance for Children and Families raised the quality of early care and education in Bertie, Camden, Currituck, Gates, and Pasquotank Counties through technical assistance. Because of this support, three new child care facilities opened their doors and three more moved from provisional status to a 3-star rating!



Cabarrus Partnership for Children assisted child care teachers in creating nurturing classroom environments through the support of an Education Specialist that provided technical assistance. The Education Specialist supported teachers in decluttering and restructuring their space for a better classroom environment, and teacher classroom management improved!!



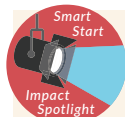
Smart Start works to create a strong foundation for programs and services to achieve successful outcomes, recruit and retain educated and qualified teachers, promote physical health and activity, and engage families. NCPC works with statewide partners to ensure the latest research and evidence-based and evidence-informed programs are offered across the state, while Local Partnerships work directly with early learning sites in each county to support teachers and ensure high-quality. Smart Start also works to bring together communities to support early education. This goes beyond working with individual centers and homes to ensuring positive transitions for children to kindergarten and raising local awareness about how critical early education is to economic development.



Smart Start of Davie County shared information on how child care is impacting the workforce with the Davie County Chamber of Commerce. After learning about the number of children on child care waitlists, one local business leader shared that they have realized the need to be more flexible with work schedules to accommodate employees who have child care issues.

Infrastructure Support for NC Pre-K

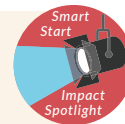
The NC Pre-K Program is designed to provide effective educational experiences to enhance school readiness for eligible 4-year-olds. Funding for NC Pre-K is made possible through a blend of federal, state, and local funds, including funding from Smart Start. Across the state, Smart Start Local Partnerships help provide the infrastructure that supports NC Pre-K.



Smart Start of Forsyth County used American Rescue Plan Act funds to champion the cause of a Pre-K Priority coalition for the school years of 2023-2024 and 2024-2025. This collaborative venture aims to transition kids seamlessly into kindergarten within 30 Pre-K classrooms. With services ranging from coaching to family engagement and professional development, participating children are expected to witness remarkable growth, particularly in reading and math proficiency.

Smart Start Local Partnerships collaborate with NC Pre-K providers and serve as co-chairs on local NC Pre-K Committees. 46 Partnerships administer the NC Pre-K program in 55 counties through separate contracts with DCDEE, providing an additional \$8,193,401 in funding for NC Pre-K classroom support. This collaboration and funding across the state helps to ensure high quality services and increase access for children.

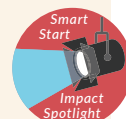
Because there is local flexibility in how NC Pre-K is administered, Smart Start can support the program in ways that best meet the needs of families and school systems.



Smart Start of Brunswick County recognized a growing number of Spanish-speaking children and families in NC Pre-K. To foster effective communication and gather more accurate data, they onboarded a skilled bilingual volunteer. This dedicated individual visited multiple child care sites, interacting with children and gathering essential insights into their development. There was improved engagement from the children, enhanced assessment results, and strengthened trust and rapport between families and staff.

A Value-Add to Subsidy Funding – Supporting Both Children and Parents

Child care subsidies provide financial assistance to help children and families access early care and education. Subsidy funds ensure that parents can enter or remain in the workforce, gain skills, work through times of crisis, and address the special needs of their children.



Rowan Smart Start provided subsidy funds through a Star License Enhancement Program to increase quality of early learning for children in Rowan County. With the funds provided to a family child care home provider, the director was able to purchase books and other supplies to add to a bookmobile to promote a love of learning and parent-child engagement in literacy.

The Smart Start Network manages over \$65 million in subsidy funds locally to boost early education effectiveness while increasing access for children who are most under-resourced. NCPC supports subsidy innovation by sharing successes and best practices across the Network.

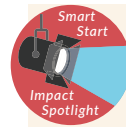
Some Local Partnerships also have scholarship funds that they provide to children and families to increase access to quality care and education.



Durham's Partnership for Children used the Child Care Scholarship program in collaboration with Child Care Services Association (CCSA) to provide financial assistance to 665 children across Durham County. This funding facilitated families' participation in high-quality child care.

Coaching for Technical Assistants

Technical assistants are essential early childhood professionals who work with teachers and caregivers in early learning sites, ensuring educators have the tools, resources and support they need to provide high-quality care and early learning.



Chatham County Partnership for Children recognized a communication barrier with a non-verbal toddler in a family child care program. By introducing a Technical Assistant specialist fluent in sign language, the previously non-verbal child was able to communicate using signs!

Coaching for Technical Assistants is a Smart Start Initiative that focuses on working with Smart Start Local Partnerships, technical assistance providers, and early learning programs to implement best practices.

This initiative aims to expand coaching and professional supports for technical assistants in the Smart Start Network, providing coaching and consultation to providers towards implementation of healthy best practices in early care and education settings.

The Initiative includes resource creation, the development of a technical assistant resource repository, and the creation of professional development and training opportunities to

enhance teacher practice and effectiveness, as identified as needed by the Smart Start Network.

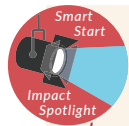
Coaching for Technical Assistants focuses on creating connections between peers and creating well-being and skill building opportunities. Peer support is critical for ensuring technical assistants can effectively support child care providers. NCPC offered peer support through a Smart Start Technical Assistant Peer Connection & Well-Being Community of Practice to professionals. Through this Community of Practice, over 140 technical assistants collaborate around supporting early childhood education! These technical assistants receive needed resources, share valuable stories, and offer critical feedback and support to each other on a regular basis.

Early Care & Education Compensation

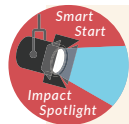
The early childhood field is experiencing many challenges, particularly with recruiting and retaining teachers. These challenges have existed for years, but the COVID-19 pandemic shone a bright light on the workforce crisis, with centers struggling to find and retain qualified caregivers.

Many early childhood professionals receive wages that are not nearly enough to make ends meet. North Carolina early education teachers make an average of \$12 per hour. Many professionals do not have access to health insurance or other benefits, and early education teachers are seven times more likely to live in poverty than public school teachers.

The Smart Start Network has successfully implemented strategies to improve recruitment, retention, and workforce development for professionals throughout the state. One way Smart Start increases workforce retention is through supplemental compensation through scholarships and incentives.

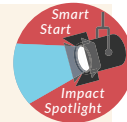


The Partnership for Children of Johnston County supported a teacher with 30 years of experience in her educational journey. The Partnership provided her with a laptop, professional development planning, and enrolled her in a program to receive funding for continuing her education. She has completed the Infant, Toddler, and Two's Certificate at Johnston Community College!

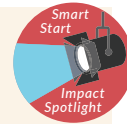


Children & Youth Partnership for Dare County forged a collaborative relationship with the local Community College to elevate educational standards of child care professionals. Participants receive application and enrollment support, scholarships, and incentives. Through this program, a family child care home provider enrolled and earned an A in a course and is now working on earning a 5-star license and an Early Childhood Certificate!

The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® North Carolina Scholarship Program and The Child Care WAGE\$® Program, which provides education-based salary supplements to teachers, are implemented in collaboration with Child Care Services Association (CCSA) to support teachers.



The Partnership for Children of Lincoln & Gaston Counties used WAGE\$ to financially reward child care professionals taking college classes. Because of additional funding, a teacher was able to complete her Associate's in Early Childhood and is progressing towards a Bachelor's degree.

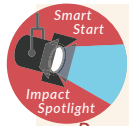


Caldwell County Smart Start directed an assistant NC Pre-K teacher to needed resources after she lost her financial aid. After earning her degree, she then used Child Care WAGE\$ and the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Scholarship to obtain a bachelor's degree. Through these resources, she was able to earn her degree without financial instability holding her back!

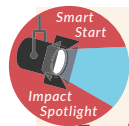
In 2022-2023, 4,534 child care teachers received an education-based salary supplement. Of these teachers, over 84% remained in their positions throughout the year!

Engaging Early Childhood Champions

Local Partnerships are also taking innovative approaches to support early learning through private funding, beyond fiscal support. Partnership staff serve on county and state early childhood taskforces, support future teachers as early as high school, help open new facilities and homes, and create workforce pipelines to increase teacher recruitment!



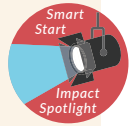
Buncombe Partnership for Children (BPFC) created *The Early Childhood Workforce Development Program*, an 8-week program with 24 hours of pre-service training, guided classroom observations, and other employment requirements with private funding. By offering the program in Spanish, providing meals and child care during training, and stipends for program completion, they have recruited and trained diverse cohorts. Graduates receive support to enroll in an introductory ECE course at a local community college. Staff provide ongoing coaching, access to wage supplement programs, continued training, and higher education support. Graduates have been employed by BPFC as substitutes and are now employed as full-time teachers! The program has been a success for child care providers, new early educators, families in need of child care, and local employers!



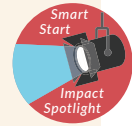
The Partnership for Children of Lenoir and Greene Counties championed the Lenoir County Teacher Compensation IDA Initiative, funded by the Lenoir County Board and a \$50,000 ARP grant. The program encourages low to moderate-income early educators in 3 to 5 Star facilities to cultivate saving habits and enhance financial literacy. After committing \$200 and attending financial classes, educators are rewarded with \$1,150 in matching funds. There were 16 graduates in the first year!

Catawba County Partnership for Children

launched the *R.A.I.S.E. (Recognizing And Investing in Supporting Early Educators)* Task Force with community partners to develop creative ways to increase the number of early childhood teachers. R.A.I.S.E. created the *Early Childhood Academy* in collaboration with **Alexander County Partnership for Children** and Catawba Valley Community College, a 2-week, 32-hour opportunity for potential new teachers to obtain required trainings, plus background checks and fingerprinting, making them eligible for employment in a child care classroom. Participants receive training from local experts and connections to community resources and support networks.

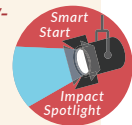


Craven Smart Start has seen a continuing decrease in the number of family child care homes (FCCs), creating a shortage of licensed facilities. Craven Smart Start was awarded a \$20,000 grant from the Harold H. Bate Foundation earlier to fund a project to open three new FCCs. With this funding, they can increase access to quality care and education!



Wilkes Community Partnership for Children

participated in a community-wide research project focused on the issue of child care availability. A comprehensive study was carried out by a taskforce through funding by the Leonard G. Herring Family Foundation. The Partnership's Executive Director served on the child care taskforce and the study's results have laid a foundation for the future of early childhood education.



See Charts and Tables on page 27

Strengthening North Carolina Families

Acknowledging that parents are a child's first teacher, Smart Start offers evidence-based and evidence-informed, family-focused programs that increase parent knowledge of development, enhance parent confidence, and increase positive parenting practices. Through established relationships with caregivers, Smart Start is also able to connect families with other community resources to ensure they have the relational and concrete supports they need to thrive.

Why is Family Support so Critical?

There are tremendous long-term benefits of family support, parent education, and home visiting programs. Studies of these programs have highlighted improved maternal and child health, increased maternal employment, and improved school readiness. With only about a quarter of North Carolina's children under 5 in licensed child care, providing parents and caregivers with the tools to help their children develop and learn is important for future success.

pushed families with young children to their limits. Parent and caregiver stress cascaded down to young children in ways science shows can be toxic, threatening their long-term well-being and development.

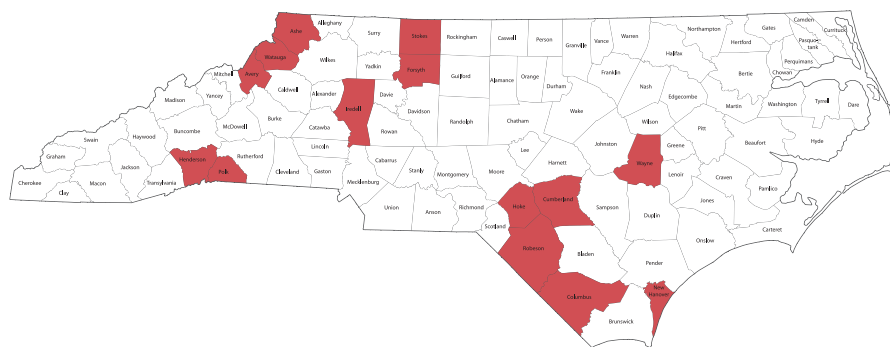
Smart Start supports parents and families by:

- Increasing parental resilience
- Creating needed social connections between families and others in their community
- Increasing knowledge of parenting and child development
- Improving access to basic needs for families
- Enhancing social and emotional development for children

65 Smart Start Local Partnerships provide at least one family support program or service to support children and their families.

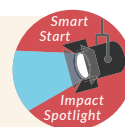
Family support programs supported and administered by the Smart Start Network include Parents as Teachers, Kaleidoscope Play and Learn, Positive Parenting Program (Triple P), Circle of Parents, Nurturing Parenting Program, and Nurse-Family Partnership among others. These programs may take the form of playgroups, home visiting and parent education, and more.

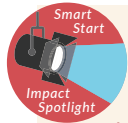
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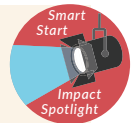
Additionally, increased stress on families and children during the COVID-19 pandemic made support for families more important than ever. Health concerns, economic uncertainty, and a decrease in early education options have

Smart Start of Forsyth County (SSFC) received a grant from the Reynolds American Foundation to bolster unconventional family structures. SSFC launched a male-centric program to promote active caregiving and engagement among single first time-fathers, uncles, and grandfathers. This initiative seeks to create a stronger support network with goals to diminish family violence, enhance child development, and reduce crime and incarceration.

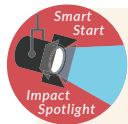




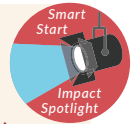
Robeson County Partnership for Children administers a county program which supports caregivers and kids up to kindergarten through weekly play and learn groups. Using the Kaleidoscope curriculum, facilitators teach parenting skills and provide developmental education. Participants improve their social skills and gain a better understanding of the role of play in school readiness. Last year, over 243 people attended!



In Iredell County, a young girl changed custody after experiencing child abuse. Her father received custody and reached out to the **Iredell Partnership for Children** for support. He enrolled in Parents as Teachers (PAT), a home visiting program, where a home visitor recognized several developmental delays. The home visitor connected the toddler to an early intervention service for further support. She is now walking, effectively feeding herself, and moving toward her goals!

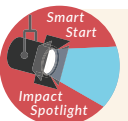


Smart Start of New Hanover County implements Circle of Parents (COP), a program which provides a supportive environment with trained facilitators for parents and caregivers to receive support. Evidence of the impact was seen in New Hanover, where a young parent received needed social support and is in a better mental space to navigate life's struggles. Because of this support, she is now back to working part-time and is hopeful about her future!



At **Stokes Partnership for Children**, a mother enrolled in Nurturing Parenting Program (NPP) after losing custody of her child. She was experiencing substance-abuse, anxiety, and post-partum depression. After completing substance abuse treatment and improving her parenting assessment scores through NPP, the mother regained custody of her child. Using additional Partnership resources, she is now on a stable career path and equipped with the skills to address financial and personal challenges head-on!

Home visiting programs provide unique support to help new parents and parents-to-be with access to education, information, and resources. For every dollar invested in home visiting, as much as \$5.70 is saved in long-term costs. Home visiting programs improve prenatal health and birth outcomes, as well as child health outcomes, by increasing immunization rates and by decreasing emergency visits and rates of abuse and neglect. NCPC has played a leading role in North Carolina's Home Visiting and Parenting Education (NC HVPE) System Collaborative, which aims to build a coordinated system to provide all families access to a range of parenting education supports.



Wayne County Partnership for Children provided parenting support through the Positive Parenting Program (Triple P). One father remarked, "When I first started the program, I really was stuck in a hole - the routine of work and home. Now, I see myself spending more time with my kids and wife, even communicating more."

Family Connects Universal Newborn Home Visiting Pilot Sites

Smart Start and Family Connects International, an evidence-based universal newborn home visiting program, launched a 3-year pilot program in eight counties to serve families of newborns in October 2021. In FY 22-23, continuing pilot participants included **Watauga, Ashe, Avery, Cumberland, Hoke, and Robeson**.

Through the program, families have access to comprehensive support to ensure healthy development of their newborn. Funded by the federal Preschool Development Grant (PDG) B-5, the pilot sites combine the benefits of the Family Connects model and Smart Start Local Partnerships with key community relationships and the ability to coordinate locally. The pilot sites offer a regional approach (covering

multiple counties), specifically targeting rural areas where access to health care resources is often challenging.

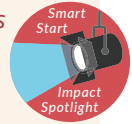
From the 2021 launch to June 2023, 2,941 families were served through 4,716 visits.

These pilots create change by meeting families where they are, at a vulnerable time after the birth of a baby. Nurse home visitors share valuable information with families about the care and development of their newborn, create critical connections to resources in their community, assess and offer social-emotional support to families, and share mental health resources. Referrals are made for children and families to agencies and programs in their community. In fact, **over 88% of the families who received one or more referrals to support services and completed a post-visit call reported at least one successful connection to a service!**

The Family Connects-Smart Start Pilots also make a difference at the community level by identifying health and medical trends or resource gaps and working with the local cross-sector Community Advisory Board to determine solutions. By utilizing Family Connects as a home visiting model while leveraging the impact of the Smart Start Network, children and families are receiving the support they need to thrive, right from the start.

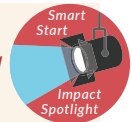
Family-Connects Smart Start Pilot sites provide vital connections between parents and mental health resources.

At one site, a nurse provided valuable education on the signs and symptoms of postpartum depression for a caregiver. When these signs appeared, the caregiver contacted their nurse home visitor and received immediate support in securing a mental health appointment!

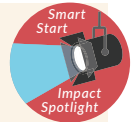


At one Family Connects-Smart Start Pilot site, staff recognized a need for a local birthing hospital to adjust their lactation support.

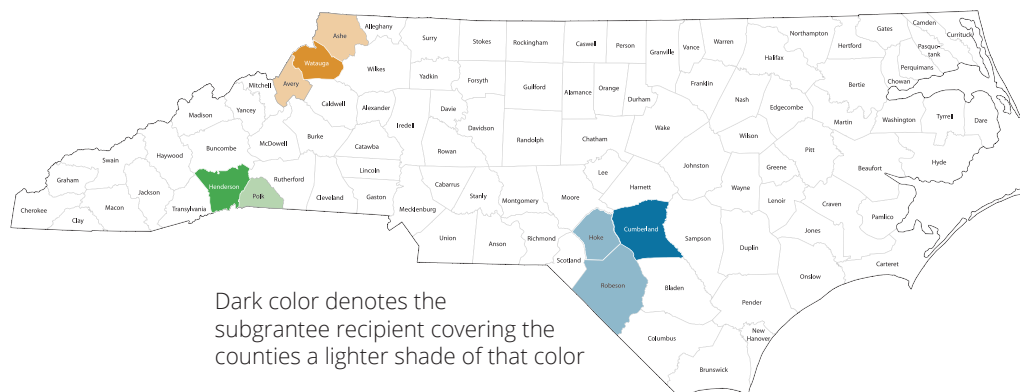
The hospital is now working with the site to gather more data from birthing families about post-discharge lactation needs, with a shared goal of the hospital funding another lactation consultant as an outpatient service!



A Family Connects nurse provided critical support to a mother by recognizing concerning health symptoms and encouraging the mother to make an appointment with her doctor where she received continued monitoring and medication for her health concerns.



Family Connects Subgrant Recipients and the Counties Covered



Smart Start's Focus on Family Engagement and Leadership

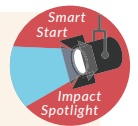
Smart Start is working to create change locally by intentionally expanding the roles that families play when it comes to programs and services in their communities. Family leaders are invited and welcomed to tables where decisions are being made that affect children and families. With PDG B-5 funding, NCPC worked with Local Partnerships, **providing over one hundred technical assistance opportunities to partnership staff**, hosting monthly Community of Practice meetings, and supporting Local Partnerships in building family engagement and leadership efforts. NCPC also hosted 10 training sessions focused on building local capacity, with over 30 Local Partnerships attending these sessions to improve family engagement and leadership in their communities.

NCPC also collaborated with MomsRising to create Starting Strong, a comprehensive set of tools to support agencies as they develop

cross-sector coalitions and center family voices. Additionally, NCPC partnered with CounterPart Consulting to provide training and coaching explicitly and intentionally centered on racial equity, as requested by Local Partnerships.

Building with and not for families is impactful work that benefits communities, families and children.

Columbus County Partnership for Children (CCPC) convenes Children First Columbus, the Columbus County Family Engagement and Leadership Coalition. The Coalition realized the power of storytelling among peers and is working to build out a Parent Advisory Committee. Leaders are also stepping up into new leadership roles with one member becoming a CCPC staff member and launching a grant focused project and another becoming a Board member!



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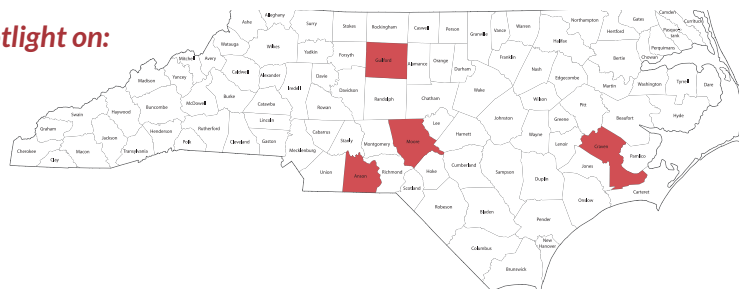
Promoting and Strengthening Early Literacy

A majority of language development occurs in the first few years of life and Smart Start supports this development by providing programs needed for success in school, work, and life. In FY 22-23, programs with wide reach across the state include Reach Out and Read (ROR), Raising a Reader (RAR), and Dolly Parton's Imagination Library (DPIL). These programs promote positive language-rich interactions—by not only providing books, but by increasing reading frequency and skills, fostering language skills, and nurturing relationships.

In fact, over 300,000 children participated in DPIL, Motherread/Fatheread, Raising a Reader (RAR), Reach Out and Read (ROR), and other programs!

In 2017, the General Assembly allocated funding to NCPC to increase access to DPIL, an early literacy program that mails age-appropriate books monthly to registered children. The General Assembly's investment leveraged Smart

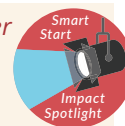
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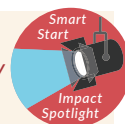
Start's community roots and resulted in rapid expansion of the program. In less than two years, every child under the age of 5 in North Carolina had access to DPIL, and by June 30, 2023, the Smart Start Network distributed more than 15 million books to North Carolina children. **The percentage of eligible children enrolled has grown from 8% in 2017 to 50% in 2023!**

Smart Start ensures children across the state receive literacy skills enhancement through a variety of literacy programs and will continue to promote a love of reading in children and enhance their literacy skills.

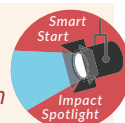
Craven Smart Start's Raising a Reader (RAR) activity received a \$12,500 grant from the Bosch Community Fund to supplement the program with STEAM activities. RAR served 184 children and families in 11 classrooms in six sites in Craven County. Raising a Reader's end of year surveys showed a significant increase in the frequency that parents and children read together!



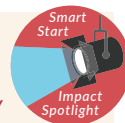
Anson County Partnership for Children collaborates with community partners to provide Raising a Reader, Reach Out & Read, Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, Motherread, Little Free Libraries, book distributions, and Bright by Text for an integrative approach to building literacy skills in young children and families. These efforts resulted in more than 15,000 books distributed to increase access, and 63% of participating families reported an increase in family-shared reading in the home.



Partners for Children & Families of Moore County embedded a Raising a Reader Blue Bag celebration into seven preschool graduation ceremonies this year. The elevation to kindergarten and the commitment of the family support to their child's early education was acknowledged. As many as 80 books rotated through each home during the implementation of the program!



Guilford County Partnership for Children's Motherread program highlighted the transformative journey of a mother and son from another country. In less than six months, the mother made significant strides in her English proficiency, advancing multiple grade levels in both reading and listening. Her son, who initially struggled with separation anxiety, blossomed into a confident young learner, engaging actively with peers and teachers.



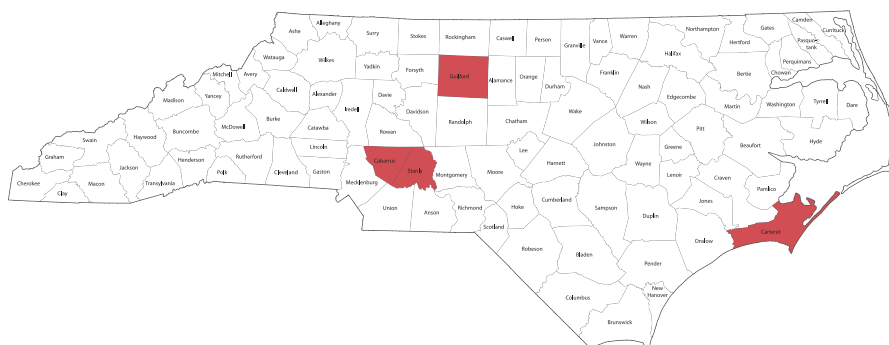
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Advancing Child & Family Health

Smart Start works to ensure families of young children, starting from birth have the resources they need for maternal, perinatal, and postpartum health, and that children birth-to-five years old are healthy. This early support includes mental health support and lactation support.

Local Partnerships move the needle forward on health and safety by connecting parents and families with resources that support social determinants of health—the nonmedical factors that influence health outcomes. Across the Network, Partnerships provide referrals to critical resources which include connecting parents to safe car seats and child passenger safety education, to medical providers, and to home visiting and parent education.

Spotlight on:

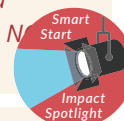


Smart Start is committed to ensuring children have the tools and resources they need to establish healthy behavior patterns. This includes building positive relationships around health and wellness through nutrition and food education and the incorporation of physical activity at child care centers and homes.

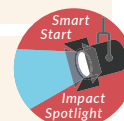
Smart Start also plays a key role in the screening for development delays for young children long before they start school. Through Assuring Better Child Health and Development (ABCD), children receive routine screenings as part of their well child visit across the state.

By supporting children right from the start, Smart Start comprehensively supports children and their families.

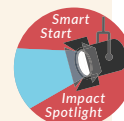
The Carteret County Partnership for Children referred a mother with depression to therapy where she healed from childhood abuse and began a journey towards alcohol use disorder remission. Through consistent support, she has remained employed and has been promoted. Her children also avoided a potential out of home placement and are now flourishing in child care and N Pre-K!



Cabarrus Partnership for Children hosted an Emergency Dental program and treated a three-year-old boy presenting with four decay areas in his primary second molars. Through continued education and trust-building, his mother has now brought in other children and may even receive dental care herself.



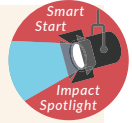
Stanly County Partnership for Children fostered a promising collaboration between its Early Childhood Resource Center (ECRC) and Pfeiffer University's Pediatric Occupational Therapy Doctorate program. The doctoral students visit the ECRC during their lab days throughout the semester, leveraging the center's resources for specific assignments. Both the ECRC and Pfeiffer University are optimistic about the outcomes of this partnership and eagerly anticipate its continued evolution.



Keeping Children Safe & Healthy

Child Care Health Consultants (CCHCs) play an important role in ensuring the health and development of young children. CCHCs are trained health professionals who work with child care programs to assess, plan, implement, and evaluate strategies to achieve high quality, safe and healthy environments. NCPC and the Smart Start Network have worked with partners to expand access to CCHCs to every county in the state. Through the work of Smart Start, the North Carolina Child Care Health and Safety Resource Center, and other partners, all counties in North Carolina have access at some level to CCHCs.

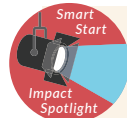
Guilford County Partnership for Children tackled a staffing crisis at a child care center, with concerns about their sick-child exclusion policy. Thanks to the partnership, a CCHC nurse intervened, listening to staff worries about illnesses spreading at the center. After providing an example of a center policy and emphasizing daily health checks, the staff felt reassured, choosing to remain at the center.



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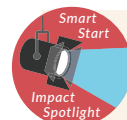
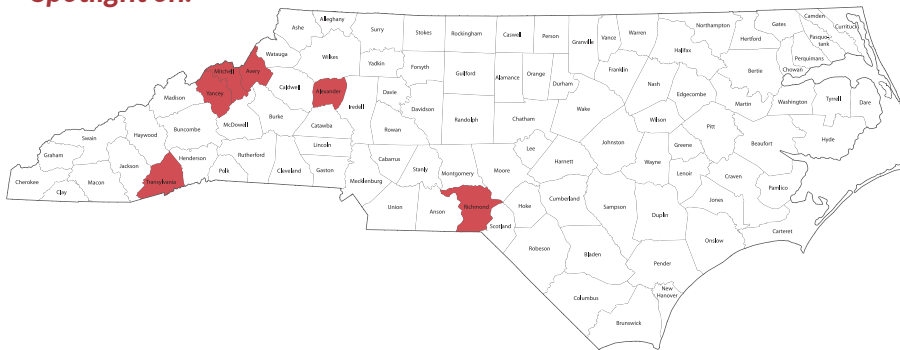
Creating Countywide Changes

In addition to supporting children and families at the individual level, Local Partnerships promote long-term change by convening and coordinating across agencies and taking a systems-approach to their collaboration with the county, state, and national organizations.

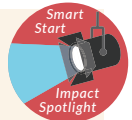


The Alexander County Partnership for Children reconvened the local Community Child Protection Team/ Child Fatality Prevention Team and Community Child Collaborative. The group branched off into two groups with the hope of pulling in a larger group of community members to participate. The Collaborative has nearly 30 members in attendance each month and has built support across sectors to address the community's mental health challenges. The Collaborative is creating a community wide strategic plan to secure additional funding for a more resilient community!

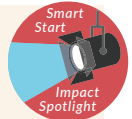
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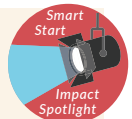
Smart Start of Transylvania County (SSTC) significantly expanded its Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) care network, emphasizing the importance of home-based care. As part of the national Voices from Home initiative, SSTC collaborated with local FFN providers to advocate for broader support. This collaborative effort has resulted in a robust network of 48 new home-care providers!



The Catawba County Partnership for Children brings together over 20 child-serving agencies and organizations on a monthly basis to strategize ways to improve kindergarten transitions, support the child care community, and educate about community resilience and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).



Richmond County Partnership for Children (RCPC) successfully collaborated with the Care and Listening Initiative (CandL) to host pivotal listening events with local families. Engaging local families and 14 early childhood practitioners, these sessions illuminated the challenges and hopes for North Carolina's early education landscape, emphasizing RCPC's proactive role in shaping the future of its community.



The Blue Ridge Partnership for Children is the backbone agency of the Avery-Mitchell-Yancey Parent Education System, a collaborative agency built as a regional approach to support families. Caregivers access six evidence-based models through a single portal on each county's Cooperative Extension website. This continuum of options allows caregivers to select the model that best fits their family's goal!

Leveraging the Smart Start Network for Statewide Initiatives

NC Healthy & Resilient Communities Initiative (NC HRCI)

Early childhood experiences lay the foundation for future health and emotional well-being. Adverse experiences can dramatically hinder not only children's social-emotional health, but also their physical and mental health long-term. Evidence shows that Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), negative social drivers of health, and other forms of trauma and adversity pose significant risks to young children as they grow and develop into adults.

NCPC is committed to increasing individual, organizational, and community level resilience across the state, serving as the backbone agency of the **NC Healthy and Resilient Communities Initiative (HRCI)**. Community resilience is the capacity to promote safe, secure, and nurturing environments for all within a community. Several Local Partnerships serve as resiliency leaders and educate, train, and organize community members to prevent ACEs.

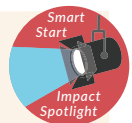
As part of the NC HRCI, NCPC and the Smart Start Network leverages its deep roots locally, bringing together more than 50 multi-sector community collaboratives to increase their capacity and best implementation strategies towards achieving resiliency across a person's lifespan. NC HRCI builds the long-term capacity of these coalitions to increase protective factors and positive childhood experiences and enhance resilience skills.

NC HRCI builds community resilience capacity by offering monthly peer connection meetings for participants to come together to share and learn from one another. Technical assistance and workshops are also offered to the individual

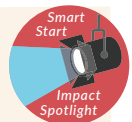
coalitions and their members as needed. The Smart Start Network is fostering community champions to create a more resilient state through these local collaboratives.

North Carolina received recognition for its innovative work with local multi-sector coalitions. An NCPC representative and other North Carolinian representatives were part of a congressional briefing in June to encourage federal investments in the Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act of 2023.

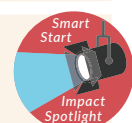
NCPC secured additional funding for eight community organizations, including three Smart Start Local Partnerships, to develop awareness, skills, and action plans to create community-led strategies to address trauma and resilience goals. Participating organizations are building their infrastructure and capacity to reach new members of their communities.

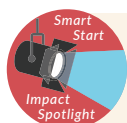


NC HRCI launched Resilient North Carolina, a website intended for all North Carolinians, with the goal of sharing best practices and connecting individuals and organizations building resilience and reducing trauma statewide.



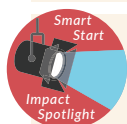
NC HRCI also launched the NC Healthy & Resilient Data Dashboard to support planning and decision making for county-level investments around resilience. Smart Start Local Partnerships and partners throughout North Carolina can use collected data to better plan and make decisions for their communities as well as examine inequities that may exist.





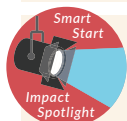
Smart Start Local Partnership staff in Bladen, Columbus, and Robeson counties worked together to increase

awareness of the four realms of ACEs and resilience as part of the Tri-County Regional Resiliency Workgroup. The three partnerships serve as a backbone organization in each county for moving the needle forward on resilience. The workgroup developed a common agenda and shared measures, participated in the Injury Free NC's Collaborative Learning Institute, and prioritized 1) coordination of resources and services among community agencies and 2) community support.



Raising Resilience Western NC, a collaborative group of 13 western Smart Start Local Partnerships,

aims to strengthen resilience skills throughout individual and organizational levels of early child care communities. The collaborative utilizes strategies like Sesame Street in Communities, Resources for Resilience Reconnect Trainings, and the Center for Trauma Resilient Communities Resilience Academies. Since June 2022, the collaborative has reached over 6000 families through 10 Sesame Street launch events across the region. Over 300 participants have been involved in RRRWNC resilience building training strategies!



Richmond County Partnership for Children joined forces with the Duke ITTI Care Project and GiGi's

Playhouse & Preschool. The initiative, anchored at Duke University and backed by DCDEE, centered on trauma-informed care coaching. GiGi's staff delved into the impact of stress on infants and toddlers and adopted new techniques to bolster their own well-being. Post-training, staff noted significant reductions in their own stress and a newfound ability to create a more calming environment for children.

Home Visiting & Parenting Education (HVPE) System

NCPC served as the fiduciary agent for the North Carolina Home Visiting & Parenting Education (HVPE) System throughout FY 2022-2023. The System is led by a statewide Collaborative Board with the goal of aligning home visiting and parenting education funds and resources, improving home visiting and parenting education services, and linking parents to other supports.

Smart Start Network representatives work alongside other experts within the Board and its committees to increase awareness and access to home visiting and parenting education programs, to develop a state home visiting and parenting education expansion plan, and to close racial disparities for those being served across the state.

In the last year the HVPE System focused on infrastructure support—allowing for long-term strategic planning and investments into the home visiting and parenting education system for the state of North Carolina. This included the securement of an investment to support a system building and advocacy effort to lay the foundation of a centralized intake system for services statewide, with locally focused design, implementation, and customization based on community needs and family voice.

HVPE leaders also served on national committees and supported other state committees, bringing lessons learned from North Carolina to national efforts. Through this discourse, Smart Start had a hand in shaping direction for home visiting research and collaboration not just in North Carolina but across the nation.

At the end of FY 2022-2023, the Collaborative System Board paused HVPE System work to determine the next steps for system building efforts. While NCPC will not serve as lead fiduciary agent in FY 2023-2024, the Network is still involved in home visiting and parenting education efforts and in the System.

Advancing Leadership and Collaborative Systems

In partnership with state agencies, philanthropy, and other organizations, NCPC collaborated on statewide projects and initiatives to enhance the state's ability to support children and families.

In FY 2022-2023, the Smart Start Network focused intentionally on innovation and on building Network-wide infrastructure that would better lead to system-level change. In partnership with state agencies, philanthropy, and other organizations, NCPC collaborated on statewide projects and initiatives to enhance the state's ability to support children and families.

Capacity and Sustainability through Shared Services

NCPC established a Shared Services Department in 2022 to enhance the collective power of the Smart Start Network. Goals of the Shared Services Department include 1) increasing purchasing power, 2) improving efficiency, 3) providing access to quality resources, 4) increasing organizational stability, and 5) increasing equity.

Since the department's inception, NCPC has been able to offer a variety of shared service opportunities to the Network. One shared service is the implementation of a Network-wide survey platform. This platform allows more Local Partnerships to collect needed data to better support children and families. Additionally, NCPC has been able to develop a resource bank for hiring consultants as well as a collection of resources for building capacity with Local Partnership staff board members. This includes training opportunities, sharing events, and the sharing of resources.

The Shared Services Department has also played a critical role in determining and building on the strengths of the Smart

Start Network, creating a more impactful Network. NCPC has created Smart Start Local Partnership Peer Networking—a space for Smart Start Local Partnership staff to connect, discuss, and explore early childhood related opportunities and challenges together.

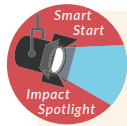
By creating services that can be shared across the Network, NCPC has offered increased opportunities for statewide collaboration, access to resources that otherwise may be inaccessible, and support to ease the overall administrative burden of Local Partnerships.

Leadership Development through System Building

Smart Start is focused on capacity building for system change. By fostering capacity building strategies, the Network is better able to support the capacity and sustainability of each Smart Start Local Partnership.

NCPC continues to support the Smart Start Network in developing training and coaching that embeds system change and advocacy strategies in the practice of Smart Start leaders through a Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation (BCBSNCF) grant. This year, the Waters Center provided workshops focused on a deeper dive into the use of specific system thinking tools. In April, the Waters Center for System Thinking repeated a six-day introduction series for Local Partnership staff. Additionally, the Center provided cohort sessions and targeted System Thinking Tools Workshops focused on the application of their system thinking learning to a specific problem of practice for Local Partnership staff.

Over 90 Smart Start Network staff members have participated in these System Thinking opportunities. These learning opportunities advance leadership competencies, deepen Network connections, and ensure staff are better ready to respond to community needs.



Local Partnership staff used system-thinking skills in their decision making, leveraging new knowledge to determine the best use of Smart Start funds for the greatest impact. Staff also used these skills in community level meetings, using system-thinking lessons to determine leverage points for building a stronger, trusting relationship with service providers.

Leadership Development Towards Building Strong Nonprofits

Smart Start has continued its partnership with the NC Center for Nonprofits. Through this partnership, every Local Partnership in the Network has full access to membership benefits offered by the NC Center for Nonprofits, ultimately providing the opportunity to increase nonprofit leadership skills. Thirty Smart Start Network staff members have participated in the Nonprofit Management Institute training to build stronger nonprofits and the use of the Center's Principles and Practices have supported more sustainable and impactful Local Partnerships.

From partnering with the NC Center for Nonprofits, the Network has saved over \$58,000 in Network capacity building. **Over 40 Local Partnerships have participated in Center trainings to build skills that support communities!**

Smart Solutions: Birth-to-Five Investments

NCPC continued developing *Smart Solutions: Birth-to-Five Investments* in FY 2022-2023. Smart Solutions is a searchable catalog of effective programs, interventions, and strategies that support children prenatal-through-five, their families, and communities.

Solutions are focused on enhancing early care and education, family support, literacy, and child and family health outcomes for children as well as early childhood systems-building and can be used right from the start—in homes, early learning environments, and within each community.

Smart Start Local Partnerships and community partners can search Smart Solutions and select options for implementation based on community need.

Future Birth-to-Five System Building Efforts

NCPC has focused on revising the Smart Start Network Needs Formula, the formula in which NCPC provides state funding to Smart Start Local Partnerships to support children. This Formula will be a guide to ensure children across the state receive adequate funding to thrive. Additionally, the Network is continuing to improve its data and finance reporting to ensure accurate comprehensive data. Smart Start will also continue to expand options within Smart Solutions to bring evidence-based and informed solutions to communities. These continual changes will allow Smart Start to create long-lasting systemic changes.

Recommendations for Legislative Action

The Smart Start Network has been a critical part of North Carolina's early childhood system for thirty years. During the 2023 legislative long session, the NC General Assembly named NCPC and the Smart Start Network as partners and key participants in a two-year Tri-Share Child Care Pilot Program to increase access to early care and education through a partnership between employees, employers, and the state. This recognizes Smart Start's essential role within North Carolina's early care and education system as well as the role Local Partnerships play in communities.

Additionally, Tri-Share shows a step in the right direction as businesses, early childhood advocates, local chambers of commerce, local and county government officials, state legislators, and members of the NC Congressional delegation come together to support children and families.

In 2024, the Smart Start Network plans to build upon the successes already made during the 2023 long legislative session. The Network will continue efforts to meet the unmet needs within local communities by requesting:

Increased unrestricted, general funding to support Smart Start Local Partnerships in meeting communities' needs.

Smart Start is not a one size fits all initiative. Increased funding will help strengthen the comprehensive, statewide, community-based system of early childhood education, family support, and whole-child development that is at Smart Start's core. Additional funding will allow Partnerships increased flexibility to provide quality solutions that best fit each community. Increased funding will also support an early childhood system that remains fragile and unstable due to long-term challenges such as early care and education workforce recruitment and the loss of federal American Rescue Plan funding.

Additional funding to support the administration of the Tri-Share Program.

Tri-Share provides a unique opportunity to increase access for quality early care and education for children and families. By increasing administrative funding support for Tri-Share, NCPC and the new regional hubs can better support start-up costs and build infrastructure for Tri-Share.

Recurring funding to expand and promote literacy development for young children through programs such as Dolly Parton's Imagination Library (DPIL).

Smart Start supports increasing investments in programs that encourage families to engage in daily reading habits early for later school success. In 2023, Smart Start received \$1.5 million, nonrecurring for each year of the 2023-2025 biennium for Imagination Library, bringing total appropriation for this time period to \$8.5 million. Additional funding is required to meet both the existing and continuous needs of young children and families statewide. **DPIL is just one of the ways Smart Start uses early literacy programs to help children and families.** However, without additional recurring funding, Smart Start will be unable to address waitlist totals and increasing costs associated with the program.

Addressing North Carolina's infant and maternal health crisis by supporting newborn and family home visiting programs.

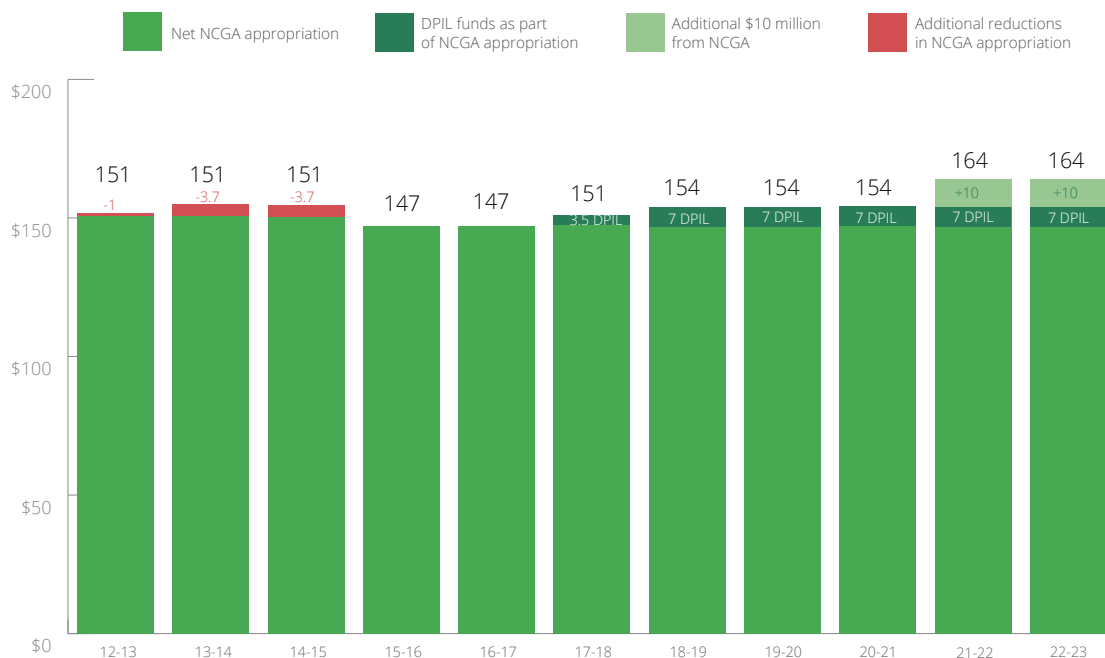
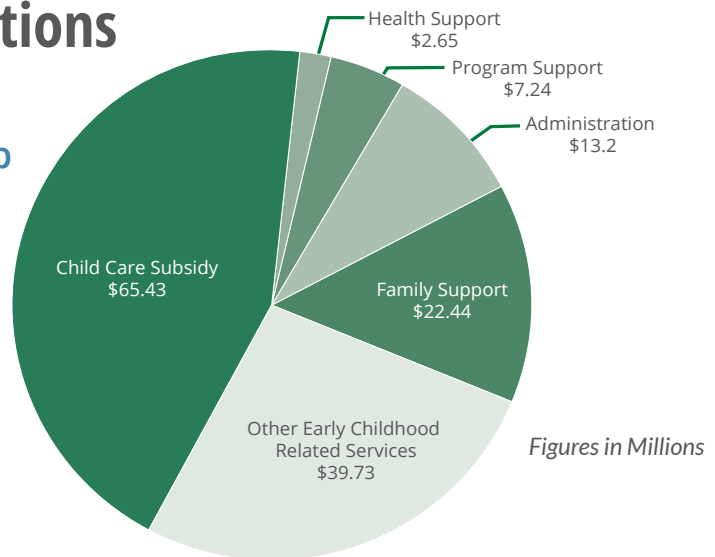
NCPC and the Smart Start Network are committed to strengthening and expanding newborn and family home visiting programs, family support programming, and parent education within local communities. Studies have shown that when trained professionals (i.e health care workers, nurses, social workers and more) visit families with newborn babies, they contribute to overall improved infant and maternal health outcomes. Additional funding is needed to fully address the state's infant and maternal health crisis, giving children and families the positive outcomes that they deserve.

Supporting Data

Finance and Appropriations

Total Local Partnership Expenditures

Fiscal Year 2022-2023
\$150.7 million



Smart Start Total Appropriation History

Fiscal Years 2012-2013 through 2022-2023 (rounded to millions)

Early Childhood Allocations Within the Total State Budget

	FY 2000-2001	FY2022-2023
Total State General Fund Budget	\$13,854,000,000	\$27,902,204,974
General Fund Smart Start Appropriation	\$231,000,000	\$157,013,453
DCD Subsidy General Fund Appropriation	\$54,000,000	\$43,768,722
NC Pre-K General Fund Budget	-	\$47,394,460
% of Total State General Fund Budget	2.1%	0.89%

Ensuring a Strong Foundation for Early Care and Education

Quality Early Care and Education

28% of all North Carolina child care facilities participated in Smart Start programs to improve child care quality.

1,102 Child care facilities received teacher and classroom support to increase teacher knowledge, teacher-child interactions, and overall quality of care.

This contributed to →

- Facilities that received support and were assessed increasing their average rating from 4.31 to 4.40*.
- The average star rating for child care facilities statewide improving from 2.76 in 2001 to 4.27.



472 child care facilities participated in early care and education programs to enhance health and safety

Early Care and Education Programs Implemented by Smart Start

Smart Start Programs	Number of Child Care Facilities Served
Child Care Health Consultants	318
Nutrition & Physical Self-Assessment for Child Care (NAP SACC)	97
Be Active Kids (BAK)	47
Shape NC	30
Preventing Obesity by Design (POD)	24
POEMS	21
Color Me Healthy	19

This contributed to →

Child Care Health Consultants Increasing Health & Safety in Child Care Facilities

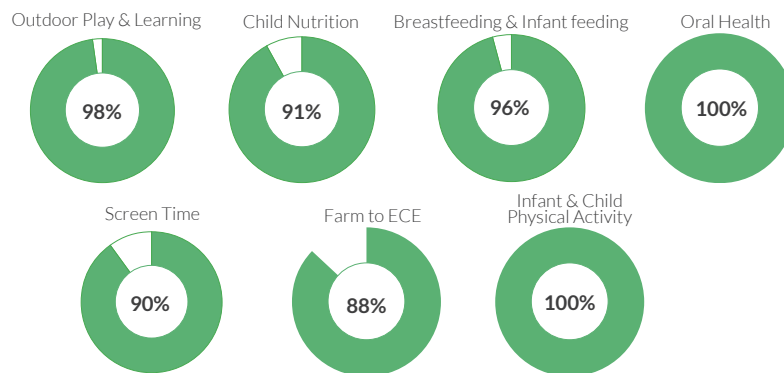
Increased Health and Safety Assessment Tool Results

Assessment Area	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Illness and Infectious Disease	82%	93%
Children with Special Healthcare Needs	68%	90%
Medication Administration	61%	87%
Safety and Injury Prevention: Training, Policy, and Supervision	90%	94%
Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery	82%	95%
Infant and Child Social Emotional Wellbeing	85%	92%
Child Abuse and Neglect	87%	95%
Physical Activity	77%	85%
Nutrition	81%	89%
Oral Health	44%	62%
Environmental Health	95%	97%
Staff Health and Wellness	78%	86%
Policy Development and Implementation	74%	81%

*The results are based on the 187 of the facilities supported by Smart Start that were assessed by DCDEE licensing consultants for Star level for 2022-2023

**Increased GO NAP
SACC Assessment
Results:**

Percentage of child care centers improving in:



Workforce Development

Over 21,000 teachers received support with higher education and training statewide.

- **21,242 teachers** received early care and education training
- **68 child care staff members** received early care and education mentoring
- **1,065 child care staff** received higher education advising
- **501 child care staff** attended a college course

This contributed to →

- Nearly **55% of children** enrolled in 1-5 star centers having at least **75% of their lead teachers** with college degrees
- **71% of children** enrolled in 1-5 Star centers have directors with college degrees
- Almost **74% of the teachers** attending a college course with Smart Start support earning a B or better

Workforce Compensation

**Over 4,100
participants received
compensation support
statewide.**

Participants receiving compensation include:

WAGE\$ Participants	4,134
ECE Professional Development Supplement Participants	241
ECE Health Benefit Recipients	159

This contributed to →

85% of those receiving compensation remained in their position throughout 2023 to provide a consistent caregiver to children.

Strengthening North Carolina Families

At-Home Family Support

35 Smart Start Local Partnerships increased parental knowledge of positive parenting practices through home visiting and parent education programs.

Home Visiting Programs Implemented by Smart Start Local Partnerships	Number of parents and guardians participating
Parents as Teachers (PAT)	1743
Nurse Family Partnership (NFP)	303
Family Support Intensive Home Visiting – Other	180
Nurturing Parenting Program (NPP) Parents and their Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers - Home Based	167

Parents as Teachers supported **1,743 parents and guardians** through at-home support. Parents as Teachers' PICCOLO Assessment shows:

Increased Parenting Skills:

Assessment Area	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Affection	11.88	12.35
Encouragement	10.44	11.4
Responsiveness	10.82	11.76
Teaching	8.55	10.52
Total Assessment of Parenting Skills	41.15	45.73

Family Support in Community Environments

29 Local Partnerships provided family support programming in community environments. These programs included parent-child playgroups and parent to parent support to support parents mentally and emotionally.

- Kaleidoscope - **1,898 parents/guardians**
- Parent to Parent Support - **173 parents/guardians**
- Other Facilitated Parent-Child Playgroups - **160 parents/guardians**

Kaleidoscope Playgroups supported nearly **1,900 parents and guardians**. The Kaleidoscope Play & Learn Caregiver Feedback Form showed parents doing “a lot more” of the following:

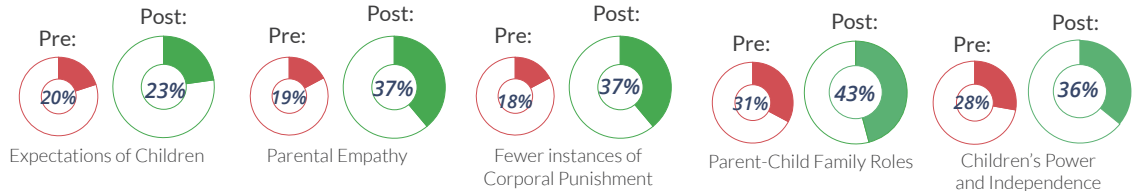
- Understanding what to expect from children at different ages - **57% of parents and guardians**
- Giving children opportunities to learn and try new things - **Approximately 63% of parents and guardians**
- Talking to or sharing ideas about caring for children with another adult - **57% of parents and guardians**

37 Local Partnerships increased parental knowledge through community family support.

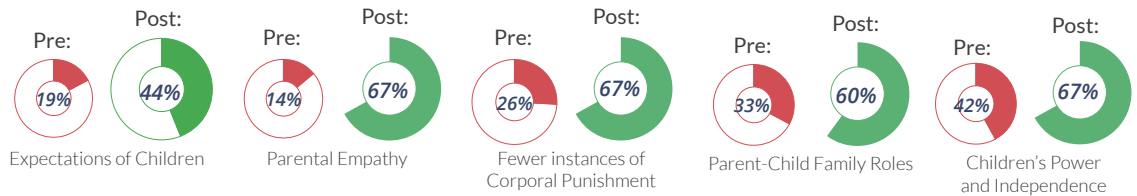
Select Family Support Programs Implemented by Smart Start Local Partnerships in Community Environments	Number of parents and guardians participating
Triple P Level 2-4	1145
Nurturing Parenting Program (NPP) - Nurturing Skills for Families	249
Incredible Years (IY) – Preschool	115
Nurturing Parenting Program (NPP) - Parents and their Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers - Group Sessions	84
Other Parent Education Programs	23

Participation in Nurturing Parenting Programs (NPP) Nurturing Skills for Families and NPP Parents and their Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers- Groups Sessions led to improvements in maltreatment. ➔

The Adult Adolescent Parenting Inventory showed more adults at low maltreatment risk after participating in Nurturing Parenting Programs (NPP) Nurturing Skills for Families:



The Adult Adolescent Parenting Inventory showed more adults at low maltreatment risk after participating in NPP Parents and their Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers- Groups Sessions:



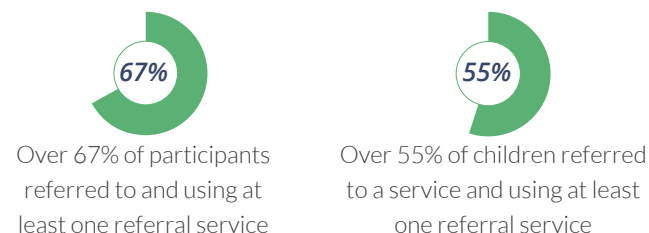
Referrals and Connections to Critical Resources

16 Smart Start Local Partnerships implement family support programs that refer parents and guardians to needed resources.

Parents and guardians receiving these referrals include:

- Family Support Services Participants - **1,698 parents and guardians**
- Family Connects Participants - **1,337 parents and guardians**
- Family Intervention Participants - **362 parents and guardians**

Participation in these services has contributed to ➔



Promoting and Strengthening Early Literacy

Access to Books and Literacy Education

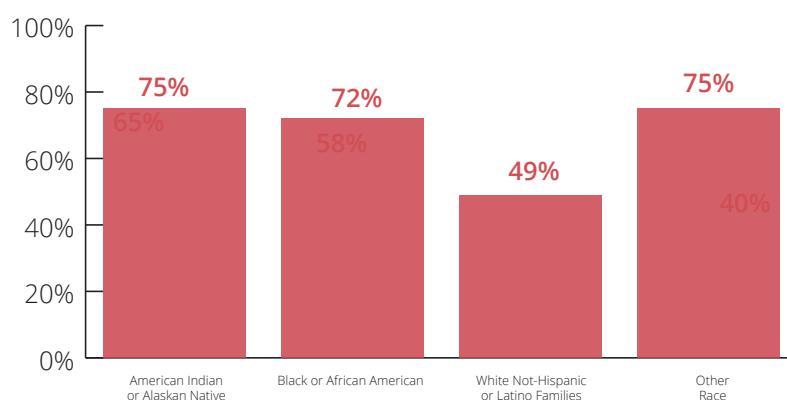
Over 300,000 children participated in Dolly Parton's Imagination Library (DPIL), Reach Out and Read (ROR), Raising a Reader (RAR), and Motherread/Fatheread.

Literacy Programs Implemented by Smart Start Local Partnerships	Number of parents and guardians participating
Dolly Parton's Imagination Library	301,856
Reach Out and Read (ROR)	83,051
Raising a Reader (RAR)	5,071
Motherread/Fatheread	417

50% of North Carolina's children aged 0-4 receive a free book each month through DPIL. Parents with children participating in DPIL, reported the following:

47% of families indicated they wouldn't be able to purchase the same number of books as provided by DPIL.

Percent of participants who wouldn't be able to purchase books without DPIL identified by race:



Out of these families, some would not have been able to purchase books at all.

- Other Race - 14% of parents
- American Indian/Alaska Native, Black/African American, and Asian Families - 10% of families
- White Not-Hispanic or Latino Families - 4% of parents

Reading Frequency

Smart Start offers a wide range of early literacy initiatives that promote parent and child shared reading time.

Raising a Reader (RAR)

Participating RAR parents reported an increase in reading to their children weekly.

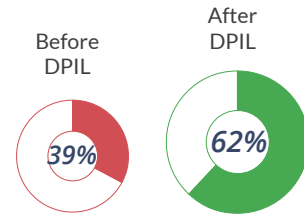
When asked how often their child looks at books, parents reported an average increase in reading weekly:

Before Enrolling in RAR: 4.4

After Enrolling in RAR: 5.8

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library (DPIL)

Parents who participated in DPIL for any length of time reported an increase in reading to their children daily from **39%** before they began receiving books to nearly **62%** after participating in DPIL.



There is a racial gap in the opportunity to read daily.

- The percent of parents/guardians who identify as White (Not Hispanic or Latino) and have an opportunity to read with their children daily **increased from 45% to 68%.**
- The percent of Black/African American families who have an opportunity to read with their children daily **increased from 23% to 45%.**
- While the percentage of families reading daily **increased by ≈20%** in both groups, a racial gap exists in terms of opportunity to read.

There is an ethnic gap in the opportunity children have to read daily.

- The percent of Not Hispanic or Latino families who have an opportunity to read with their children daily **increased from 41% to 64%.**
- The percent of Hispanic or Latino families who have an opportunity to read with their children daily **increased from 22% to 49%.**

Reading Quality

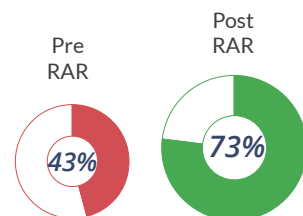
Participation in literacy programs increases the reading strategies used by children and their parents.

How Parental Reading Strategies Improved Before and After DPIL:

	Before DPIL	Now
I change my voice to sound like animals or people to animate the story.	72%	87%
I ask my children questions about the story.	55%	80%
I point to pictures or other clues to help my children understand new words in the book.	78%	92%
I point out or point to the text or letters as I am reading a book with my children.	65%	82%
My children look at the book when I am reading to them.	89%	95%

After participating in Raising a Reader (RAR), families enhanced their literacy skills.

The number of families who used at least 4 dialogic behaviors most or all of the time increased before and after Raising a Reader implementation.



Advancing Child & Family Health

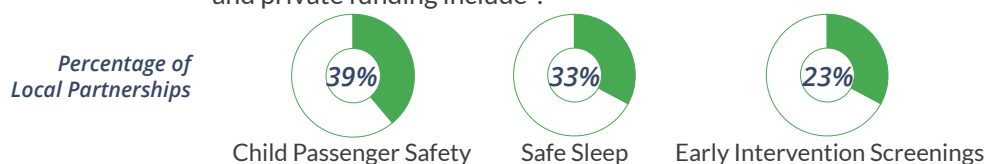
Smart Start Local Partnerships spent over \$2.6 million on health-related programs to support children and families.

State Expenditures of Health Services:	
Early Intervention Services	\$1,272,050.25
Prenatal/Newborn Services	\$837,113.02
Assuring Better Child Health and Development (ABCD)	\$304,057.60
Health Care Access and Support	\$217,579.96
Oral Health Services	\$23,869.68

Partnerships Lead on Child & Family Health

Smart Start Local Partnerships reported that they served as leaders in their communities on various health outcomes:

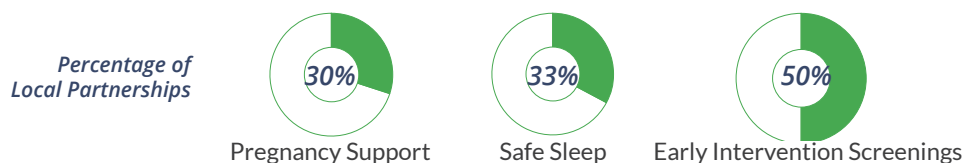
3 Areas that Local Partnerships lead on with NC State Appropriation and private funding include*:



Partnerships also led on Postpartum and Pregnancy Support.

Partnerships Support on Child & Family Health

3 Areas that Local Partnerships participated in within communities include*:



Partnerships also participated in breastfeeding support, oral health, and child passenger safety activities.

Early Childhood Health Referrals

Smart Start is a key reason why children receive critical early intervention services across the state because of Assuring Better Health and Development (ABCD).

ABCD helps primary health care practices perform general developmental and autism-specific screenings and connects children to specialized therapies and other early intervention services.

ABCD serves **48,671 children** annually.

*The results are based on a survey of 66/75 Smart Start Local Partnerships.

Smart Start Prioritizes Health

NCPC serves on state and regional committees to lead, advise, and collaborate on child and family health priorities.

NCPC participates on over 20 Child and Family Health committees and workgroups, including:

NC Perinatal Health Strategic Plan Team

**NC Inter-agency
Coordinating Council (NC ICC)**

North Carolina Child Fatality Task Force

**North Carolina Infant and Early Childhood
Mental Health Association (NCIMHA)**

**Statewide Advisory Committee on Infant
Mental Health Endorsement®**

**NC Breastfeeding-Friendly Child Care
Designation Application Review Committee**

**Early Well Coordinating Team (formally Social
Emotional Health Initiative Leadership)**

**NC State Health Improvement Plan- Adverse
Childhood Experiences (ACE's) Subcommittee**

NC Violence Prevention Team

Child FindACCESS State Leadership Team

AND MORE!

Advancing Leadership and Collaborative Systems

Building a Sustainable Network through Leadership Development

Number of Smart Start Local Partnership staff participated in cohort learning opportunities focused on system thinking.	90
Number of Smart Start Local Partnerships that received training as part of a Smart Start Capacity Building Cohort by the NC Center for Nonprofits.	11
Number of Smart Start Network staff who participated in Nonprofit Management Institute by the NC Center for Nonprofits.	30
Number of Smart Start Local Partnership staff who participated in the NC Center for Nonprofits trainings from Fall 2021- Spring 2023.	112
Number of Smart Start Local Partnership staff with active membership accounts with the North Carolina Center for Nonprofits.	400+
Number of Local Partnerships that participated in the NC Center's Annual Conference in fall of 2022.	8

Building Strong Systems for Early Childhood

Number of Peer Connection gatherings hosted by NC Healthy & Resilient Communities Initiative (NC HRCI).	11 gatherings with at least 20 attendees each
Number of counties with multi-sector coalition/collaboratives working to reduce and respond to individual and/or community adversity.	50+
Number of counties with census-level data in the Smart Start Community Indicators Dashboard.	100
Number of Early Care and Education Committees, Coalitions, and Workgroups across the state that NCPC staff serve on with the goal of raising the quality of early care and education.	31

Appendix

Report to the North Carolina General Assembly Smart Start Program Match & Fundraising Report Session Law 2021-180 Section 9C.6.(d)

The North Carolina Partnership for Children (NCPC) and local partnerships are required to match 19% of funds allocated by the General Assembly through cash and in-kind contributions. Per Session Law 2021-180, Section 9C.6.(d), "Of the funds the North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc., and the local partnerships are required to match, contributions of cash shall be equal to at least thirteen percent (13%) and in-kind donated resources shall be equal to no more than six percent (6%) for a total match requirement of nineteen percent (19%) for each year of the 2021-2023 fiscal biennium."

Under Session Law 2021-180, Section 9C.6.(d), the North Carolina General Assembly requires that the NCPC report on the cash and in-kind contributions received by local partnerships and NCPC in its annual report as required under G.S. 143B-168.12(d). This report is submitted as an appendix to the annual report in response to that requirement.

<i>FY 2022-2023 Match Amounts by Local Partnerships and NCPC</i>		Cash	In-Kind	Total
	Local Partnerships	\$47,552,320	\$8,331,437	\$55,883,757
	NCPC	\$896,525	\$92,338	\$988,863
	Total	\$48,448,845	\$8,423,775	\$56,872,620

Per Session Law 2021-180, Section 9C.6.(i), "Notwithstanding subsection (h) of this section, the North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc., and local partnerships may use up to one percent (1%) of State funds for fund-raising activities." This provision requires NCPC to include in its annual report required under G.S. 143B-168.12(d) a report on these funds expended on fundraising.

For FY 2022-2023, 24 local partnerships of the Smart Start network (32% of all local partnerships) took advantage of the flexibility to transfer up to 1% of program dollars to be used for fundraising activities. Approximately \$521,230 of Smart Start program dollars were transferred and spent on fundraising activities by these 24 partnerships, in addition to their regular administrative expenditures. Local partnerships indicated that these funds were used most frequently for staff time for grant writing and fund development work in their communities. Additional uses included donor management software, fundraising solicitations, consultant services and grant writing courses. These activities help to build capacity in each local community to raise more private funds

The North Carolina Partnership for Children Summary of LP Program Match For the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 2023

Local Partnership Name	Cash	In-Kind	Total	Program Match Target	Over(Under)
Alamance	895,161.17	105,842.04	1,001,003.21	412,851.00	588,152.21
Albemarle	189,895.83	409,684.52	599,580.35	324,148.00	275,432.35
Alexander	106,243.88	27,141.70	133,385.58	111,833.00	21,552.58
Alleghany	59,812.93	753.95	60,566.88	35,554.00	25,012.88
Anson	360,513.78	14,718.52	375,232.30	103,774.00	271,458.30
Ashe	77,750.84	23,901.49	101,652.33	82,818.00	18,834.33
Beaufort-Hyde	80,471.44	119,046.88	199,518.32	150,235.00	49,283.32
Bladen	195,836.25	7,712.10	203,548.35	120,871.00	82,677.35
Blue Ridge	423,834.56	34,685.93	458,520.49	150,610.00	307,910.49
Brunswick	176,882.05	16,513.67	193,395.72	263,199.00	(69,803.28)
Buncombe	1,007,698.41	187,511.63	1,195,210.04	517,070.00	678,140.04
Burke	373,576.57	36,089.27	409,665.84	373,302.00	36,363.84
Cabarrus	145,878.29	141,279.46	287,157.75	442,364.00	(155,206.25)
Caldwell	244,314.40	29,211.79	273,526.19	318,517.00	(44,990.81)
Carteret	37,618.28	31,068.08	68,686.36	130,977.00	(62,290.64)
Caswell	78,170.63	25,662.81	103,833.44	63,516.00	40,317.44
Catawba	433,106.60	7,530.47	440,637.07	494,336.00	(53,698.93)
Chatham	224,730.27	45,120.08	269,850.35	185,203.00	84,647.35
Chowan/Perquimans	63,233.85	90,019.13	153,252.98	88,819.00	64,433.98
Cleveland	2,779,132.10	229,054.94	3,008,187.04	337,882.00	2,670,305.04
Columbus	273,778.16	38,917.32	312,695.48	178,252.00	134,443.48
Craven	164,342.61	30,612.47	194,955.08	320,771.00	(125,815.92)
Cumberland	881,531.39	178,418.59	1,059,949.98	1,298,443.00	(238,493.02)
Dare	357,713.14	28,497.56	386,210.70	96,287.00	289,923.70
Davidson	314,519.87	116,958.87	431,478.74	525,766.00	(94,287.26)
Davie	319,080.92	29,620.32	348,701.24	92,050.00	256,651.24
Down East	427,183.61	46,551.63	473,735.24	500,953.00	(27,217.76)
Duplin	55,721.67	133,562.74	189,284.41	205,398.00	(16,113.59)
Durham	3,168,626.17	167,006.93	3,335,633.10	1,071,388.00	2,264,245.10
Foothills	551,966.06	2,153.05	554,119.11	373,524.00	180,595.11
Forsyth	609,442.59	12,954.94	622,397.53	928,749.00	(306,351.47)
Franklin-Granville-Vance	200,633.83	122,133.27	322,767.10	473,869.00	(151,101.90)
Guilford	354,542.25	1,480,096.09	1,834,638.34	957,700.00	876,938.34
Halifax-Warren	187,011.21	3,511.35	190,522.56	267,160.00	(76,637.44)
Harnett	176,362.38	145,208.42	321,570.80	377,316.00	(55,745.20)
Henderson	305,231.64	198,667.56	503,899.20	220,764.00	283,135.20
Hertford-Northampton	192,318.50	25,689.91	218,008.41	151,841.00	66,167.41
Hoke	68,375.62	281,571.54	349,947.16	184,135.00	165,812.16
Iredell	278,500.22	124,638.94	403,139.16	412,574.00	(9,434.84)
Johnston	268,274.96	107,847.95	376,122.91	463,055.00	(86,932.09)
Jones	-	23,491.00	23,491.00	41,475.00	(17,984.00)

Local Partnership Name	Cash	In-Kind	Total	Program Match Target	Over(Under)
Lee	96,222.84	8,756.85	104,979.69	195,777.00	(90,797.31)
Lenoir and Greene	30,901.95	108,945.61	139,847.56	304,915.00	(165,067.44)
Lincoln and Gaston	541,884.17	32,971.57	574,855.74	801,316.00	(226,460.26)
Madison	104,037.50	56,726.80	160,764.30	71,485.00	89,279.30
Martin-Pitt	279,251.85	87,396.10	366,647.95	502,111.00	(135,463.05)
Mecklenburg	15,938,655.10	412,213.84	16,350,868.94	2,512,987.00	13,837,881.94
Montgomery	20,168.57	46,591.71	66,760.28	104,320.00	(37,559.72)
Moore	173,065.37	66,129.02	239,194.39	218,263.00	20,931.39
New Hanover	462,284.75	138,597.93	600,882.68	427,924.00	172,958.68
Onslow	2,262,299.10	35,373.61	2,297,672.71	880,538.00	1,417,134.71
Orange	157,262.24	75,236.69	232,498.93	395,761.00	(163,262.07)
Pamlico	77,821.49	54,085.51	131,907.00	37,421.00	94,486.00
Pender	71,162.53	57,650.73	128,813.26	124,983.00	3,830.26
Person	230,048.85	6,292.17	236,341.02	136,781.00	99,560.02
Randolph	602,926.01	610,153.90	1,213,079.91	398,026.00	815,053.91
Region A	584,103.06	92,885.97	676,989.03	430,309.00	246,680.03
Richmond	56,008.65	65,377.71	121,386.36	192,601.00	(71,214.64)
Robeson	262,443.16	292,656.48	555,099.64	506,847.00	48,252.64
Rockingham	173,350.24	107,904.03	281,254.27	247,346.00	33,908.27
Rowan	137,615.45	240,816.40	378,431.85	371,251.00	7,180.85
Sampson	83,188.43	22,449.21	105,637.64	214,686.00	(109,048.36)
Scotland	35,149.77	1,436.10	36,585.87	116,988.00	(80,402.13)
Stanly	171,437.29	88,130.43	259,567.72	236,668.00	22,899.72
Stokes	156,857.52	36,362.95	193,220.47	140,457.00	52,763.47
Surry	99,868.56	207,677.59	307,546.15	233,110.00	74,436.15
Transylvania	1,138,552.68	-	1,138,552.68	63,485.00	1,075,067.68
Tyrrell-Washington	39,619.01	8,046.20	47,665.21	73,547.00	(25,881.79)
Union	231,042.68	229,050.15	460,092.83	487,056.00	(26,963.17)
Wake	5,076,881.62	-	5,076,881.62	2,412,120.00	2,664,761.62
Watauga	365,075.75	61,132.30	426,208.05	80,481.00	345,727.05
Wayne	248,705.08	25,090.50	273,795.58	335,274.00	(61,478.42)
Wilkes	287,710.09	95,504.94	383,215.03	232,137.00	151,078.03
Wilson	202,491.25	34,229.19	236,720.44	260,649.00	(23,928.56)
Yadkin	45,208.71	44,906.14	90,114.85	116,910.00	(26,795.15)
Grand Total	47,552,320.25	8,331,437.24	55,883,757.49	27,713,879.00	28,169,878.49



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