

## Early Childhood Education Priorities for the 2022 North Carolina Legislative Session

Early childhood education prepares children to be ready for kindergarten and beyond. You only get one chance at learning the fundamentals – how to read, how to talk, how to think. Strong early childhood education programs set children up for success in kindergarten, reading at grade level, and high school graduation on time.

Every parent in every corner of North Carolina deserves the chance to choose early childhood education that will give their children a strong start for happy, healthy lives and greater school success. Increased investments in early education will give more young children the opportunity to grow, learn, and succeed.

North Carolina's advocates for early childhood education share the following priorities for the 2022 Legislative Session:

- Increasing children's access to diverse, safe, and nurturing early learning experiences;
- Providing working parents with affordable choices for child care so that they can work and support their families;
- Compensating early educators fairly to address staff shortages in child care and provide stability for children; and
- Providing sustainable funding to help child care businesses keep their doors open to serve their communities.

Together, these policies will support young children's healthy development, support family economic security, support our state's businesses and economic growth, and prepare today's children for tomorrow's jobs. In addition, these policies support businesses across the state that depend on their employees having child care in order to work.

Federal relief dollars have been essential in keeping many of our state's child care programs afloat during the ongoing pandemic, but the child care sector was unstable long before 2020. Only a fraction of eligible children in our state get the benefits of a high-quality early education.

**The child care sector needs increased, sustained investments so that early learning programs across the state are there for *all* North Carolina children and families – now and in the future.**



## PRIORITY AREAS

### AFFORDABILITY

**\$73 million annually to fund a new child care subsidy rates structure.**

Children deserve high-quality learning, which lays the foundation for success in school and life. The child care subsidy rates structure should provide child care programs in all 100 counties with adequate and equitable rates that incorporate the true cost of care. Raising all subsidy rates to the 2018 level and establishing a statewide floor creates greater equity in funding across the state for both child care centers and family child care homes, particularly in rural communities.

### STAFFING

**\$36 million annually to expand the Child Care WAGE\$ program statewide.**

Children thrive in early education programs when they have stable, reliable relationships with their teachers. WAGE\$ can improve teacher recruitment and retention, stabilize the early education workforce, and support early educators who pursue degrees in early education to ensure high-quality early learning experiences for young children.

### ACCESSIBILITY

Continue to develop and fund strategies to stabilize and expand the child care industry, so that all children and families in every county have access to affordable choices for high-quality early learning programs. This includes ongoing and increased investments for **Smart Start**, **NC Pre-K**, and **Child Care Subsidy Assistance** for working families.



*For more information:*

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