



FACT SHEET

# The State of Early Childhood in North Carolina

April 10, 2015

In 2001, North Carolina began the More at Four Pre-Kindergarten Program, now known as NC Pre-K, a voluntary preschool for low-income 4-year-olds.<sup>1</sup> The program received a 20 percent decrease in funding in the 2011-12 school year, consequently decreasing available slots for children.<sup>2</sup> In spite of the declines, North Carolina has one of the highest-quality programs in the country. North Carolina is also the recipient of funding through a Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant that will increase the quality of child care, support teacher and technical assistance providers, and provide professional development services.<sup>3</sup> North Carolina's early childhood programs should expand accessibility with a substantial increase in funding. The program currently serves 23 percent of the age-eligible population in all settings, including public schools, child care centers, and family child care homes.<sup>4</sup>

---

## North Carolina families have quality but not access

One of the leading research intuitions on state preschool programs, the National Institute for Early Education Research, or NIEER, has established 10 benchmarks of quality. North Carolina meets all 10. This high quality can be attributed to the rigorous standards for private and public programs, including high quality ratings under the state child care star-rated system and the North Carolina State Board of Education early learning standards.<sup>5</sup>

- In 2013, North Carolina ranked 13 out of 41 states in per-student funding.<sup>6</sup>
- North Carolina currently spends \$4,960 per student, which is well above the national average of \$4,026.<sup>7</sup>

In 2013,  
North Carolina ranked  
**13** <sup>out</sup> of **41**  
states in preschool  
per-student funding

North Carolina  
currently spends  
**\$4,960**  
per student, which is well  
above the national average  
of \$4,026.<sup>7</sup>

---

## Early childhood education helps support North Carolina's most vulnerable populations

Many North Carolina children live in families feeling severe financial strain. Growing up in such an environment affects young children's ability to thrive, putting them behind their wealthier peers on a number of developmental, educational, and social measures. The stress that often comes with living in poverty can also adversely affect brain development in children's early years. High-quality early education has been proven to alleviate these risk factors and help close the school-readiness gap.<sup>8</sup>

- 54 percent of North Carolina children under age 6 live in low-income families.<sup>9</sup>
- 14 percent of North Carolina children live in areas of concentrated poverty, putting them at a greater risk of starting kindergarten behind.<sup>10</sup>

---

## Child care is out of reach for many North Carolina families

North Carolina is one of 31 states where the cost of child care is higher than that of in-state tuition and fees at a public college.<sup>11</sup> In North Carolina, where 68 percent of children under age 6 have all available parents in the workforce, child care is not a luxury—it is a necessity.<sup>12</sup>

- For a family with children in North Carolina, the median income is \$51,900 per year.<sup>13</sup>
- The average annual cost of a child care center in North Carolina is \$9,107 for an infant and \$7,471 for a 4-year-old.<sup>14</sup>

---

## Endnotes

1 W. Steven Barnett and others, "The State of Preschool 2013: State Preschool Yearbook" (New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2013), available at <http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/yearbook2013.pdf>.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Jack P. Shonkoff and others, "The Lifelong Effects of Early Childhood Adversity and Toxic Stress," *Pediatrics* 129 (1) (2012): e232–e246, available at <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/129/1/e232.short>.

9 National Center for Children in Poverty, "North Carolina: Demographics of Young, Low-Income Children," available at [http://www.nccp.org/profiles/NC\\_profile\\_8.html](http://www.nccp.org/profiles/NC_profile_8.html) (last accessed March 2015).

10 Kids Count Data Center, "Children Living in Areas of Concentrated Poverty" (Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013), available at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/>

tables/6795-children-living-in-areas-of-concentrated-poverty#detailed/2/2-52/false/1376,1201,1074,880,11/any/13891,13892.

11 Child Care Aware of America, "Parents and the High Cost of Child Care" (2013), available at [http://usa.childcareaware.org/sites/default/files/cost\\_of\\_care\\_2013\\_103113\\_0.pdf](http://usa.childcareaware.org/sites/default/files/cost_of_care_2013_103113_0.pdf).

12 Kids Count Data Center, "Children Under Age 6 with All Available Parents in the Labor Force" (Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013), available at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/5057-children-under-age-6-with-all-available-parents-in-the-labor-force#detailed/2/2-52/false/36,868,867,133,38/any/11472,11473>.

13 Kids Count Data Center, "Median Family Income Among Households with Children" (Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013), available at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/65-median-family-income-among-households-with-children#detailed/2/2-52/false/36,868,867,133,38/any/365>.

14 Child Care Aware of America, "Parents and the High Cost of Child Care."

15 Authors' calculations based on Child Care Aware of America, "Parents and the High Cost of Child Care."

# 68%

of children under age 6 have all available parents in the workforce

For a typical family with an infant and a 4-year-old in North Carolina, the average cost of child care at a center amounts to

# 1/3

of annual income<sup>15</sup>