



Gaston County: Child Care Profile

Children's development and learning in the first few years lay the foundation for all of the years that follow. Children who attend high-quality early education programs are better prepared for success in school—academically, socially and emotionally. However, in North Carolina there is an extreme shortage of quality, affordable child care that supports families and helps young children grow, learn and succeed.

North Carolina needs to increase access to child care assistance for working families with young children.

- **Young children are missing out on opportunities for healthy development and early learning.** Positive early learning environments are crucial to physical, intellectual and socio-emotional development. Ensuring that children 0-5 have access to quality early care and learning programs lays the foundation for lifelong learning.¹
- **Quality care and learning is out of reach for low-income working families, and all North Carolina counties face child care assistance shortages.** The average annual cost of infant child care in North Carolina is \$9,255 and the cost of child care for a 4-year-old is \$7,592.² A single parent with one infant and one 4-year-old, earning \$41,560, which could qualify for child care assistance at 200% of the federal poverty level, would need to spend over 40% of their income on child care. In **Gaston County**, **4,146** children 0-5 could qualify for child care assistance under current eligibility standards. However, only **971** children 0-5 received child care assistance in 2018, **23%** of all those who could qualify.³
- **Waiting for child care assistance has a two-generation impact.** When families don't have access to child care assistance, parents lose opportunities for employment and young children miss out on quality early education opportunities. The waitlist for child care assistance does not measure all unmet need, but is one indicator of need at a specific point in time. In **Gaston County**, **418** children under age 6 were on the child care assistance waitlist in September 2018.⁴

North Carolina needs to address the acute shortage of child care programs.

- **Working parents want access to quality child care.** In North Carolina, 65% of children under six live in households with all parents working.⁵ It's important for parents to know that they have a safe, nurturing and stimulating environment in which to leave their children while they continue to increase the financial security of their families.
- **There is a shortage of child care for young children of all ages.** Almost all, 99 of 100, North Carolina counties qualify as child care deserts for babies, with more than three infants and toddlers competing for every available slot.⁶ Preschool children also face shortages of child care, with less than half of children who could qualify for NC Pre-K served in 2018.⁷
- **Even in counties with child care programs, quality child care is scarce.** In **Gaston County**, **65** child care programs have four or five stars, **68%** of all programs. **2,984** young children (**70%** of all children under 6 enrolled in licensed child care) are served in these high-quality programs.⁸

¹ Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. (2016). 8 Things to Remember about Child Development.

² Economic Policy Institute. (2016). "The Cost of Child Care in North Carolina."

³ Data retrieved from U.S. Census, (2000); DCDEE, (2017); and NC FAST, (February 2019).

⁴ Waitlist data retrieved from DCDEE, March 2019.

⁵ Center for American Progress. (2018). Early Learning Fact Sheet: North Carolina.

⁶ Jessen-Howard, S., Malik, R., Workman, S., & Hamm, K. (2018). Understanding Infant and Toddler Child Care Deserts. Center for American Progress.

⁷ Barnett, S.W. & Kasmir, R. (2018). Barriers to Expansion of NC Pre-K: Problems and Potential Solutions. National Institute for Early Education Research.

⁸ Data retrieved from DCDEE, March 2019.