



## *Support Families by Expanding Parenting Education Programs*

### Introduction

Parents play the lead role in their children's healthy development, but all parents are stretched in the earliest months and years of their children's lives. Today's parents are often isolated and without extended family and adequate support networks. Parents can benefit from some guidance in order to do the best job they can in raising their children and supporting their healthy development and early learning. In North Carolina, parenting education programs are not widely available or accessible to families who would like to access these beneficial programs. There is an urgent need to expand funding for parenting education programs and to develop a comprehensive system of family support in every county in North Carolina.

### Why Is This Important to Do Now?

#### **Parenting education improves child outcomes.**

When parents participate in parenting programs, their children exhibit improved behavior, including increases in empathy, sharing, and helping others, and decreases in aggression and hyperactivity. Parenting education is also associated with a decreased risk of child abuse and neglect because parents learn age-appropriate expectations of children, alternatives to physical punishment, and successful strategies to manage children's challenging behaviors.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Parenting education programs strengthen the relationship between parents and children and increase parenting skills.**

Parenting education programs have been shown to improve parents' confidence and competency when it comes to parenting. Parenting education also increases the use of positive parenting practices, nurturing behavior, parental knowledge of child development, and healthy communication between family members.<sup>2</sup>

#### **Parenting education increases parents' social networks and improves parental mental health.**

Parenting education increases social connections among parents which provides emotional support and opportunities to exchange advice and share resources.<sup>3</sup> Participation in parenting education programs has also been shown to improve parental mental health and well-being by decreasing isolation and increasing overall positive feelings about parenthood, which leads to decreases in depression, anxiety, anger, guilt, and stress.<sup>4</sup>

#### **Parenting education is a worthwhile investment for North Carolina.**

Child abuse and neglect costs the U.S. \$220 million every day in child welfare, medical, mental health, education, and criminal justice expenses.<sup>5</sup> Investing in parenting education is a proven strategy to strengthen families, lower the number of children impacted by abuse and neglect, and decrease the associated financial costs.<sup>6</sup> Research has found that for every dollar invested in evidence-based parenting education, there is a substantial return on investment. For example, each dollar invested in the *Incredible Years* program shows a return of \$5.60 and each dollar invested in the *Triple P* program shows a return of \$10.05.<sup>7</sup>

### Access to parenting education programs is inconsistent across North Carolina.

Families have differing needs and reasons for wanting to participate in parenting education programs, and different parenting programs offer distinct services for special parent groups, such as parents with new babies or parents at high risk for child abuse or neglect. In North Carolina, there are seven leading parenting education programs, with Triple P, Circle of Parents, and Incredible Years being the most common. However, not all of these programs are available in all counties across the state. Access to parenting education programs is highly dependent on where a family lives. Rural and under-resourced areas tend to have the fewest programs, which is particularly concerning, since poverty and isolation are two risk factors for child maltreatment.<sup>8</sup>

In North Carolina, parenting education programs are funded through public and private funders. For example, Smart Start, a non-profit private agency that receives state funding, funds a variety of evidence-based parenting education programs in 57 counties across the state. The North Carolina Division of Social Services (NCDSS) funds parenting programs focused on promoting safe and stable families and child abuse prevention. NCDSS funds a variety parenting education programs through federal Promoting Safe and Stable Families and Community Based Child Abuse Prevention Program funds, state NC Children’s Trust funds, and a specific and recurring appropriation from the NC General Assembly for Triple P. Together, Smart Start and NCDSS fund programs in 77 counties (see Figures 1 and 2).

The most universally available parenting education program in North Carolina is Triple P, a parenting education program organized and facilitated by the North Carolina Division of Public Health (NCDPH). Triple P is operated regionally in North Carolina, with all 100 counties having access to services through a regional Lead Health Department. Triple P is also available to families online. Triple P is funded by NCDPH, NCDSS, Smart Start, and private foundations.<sup>9</sup> While all counties have access to Triple P, access to other parenting education programs varies geographically across the state. Families in central and western North Carolina have access to a wider variety of programs, while many counties in eastern and southern pockets of the state have access to only one type of program (see Figure 1).<sup>10</sup>

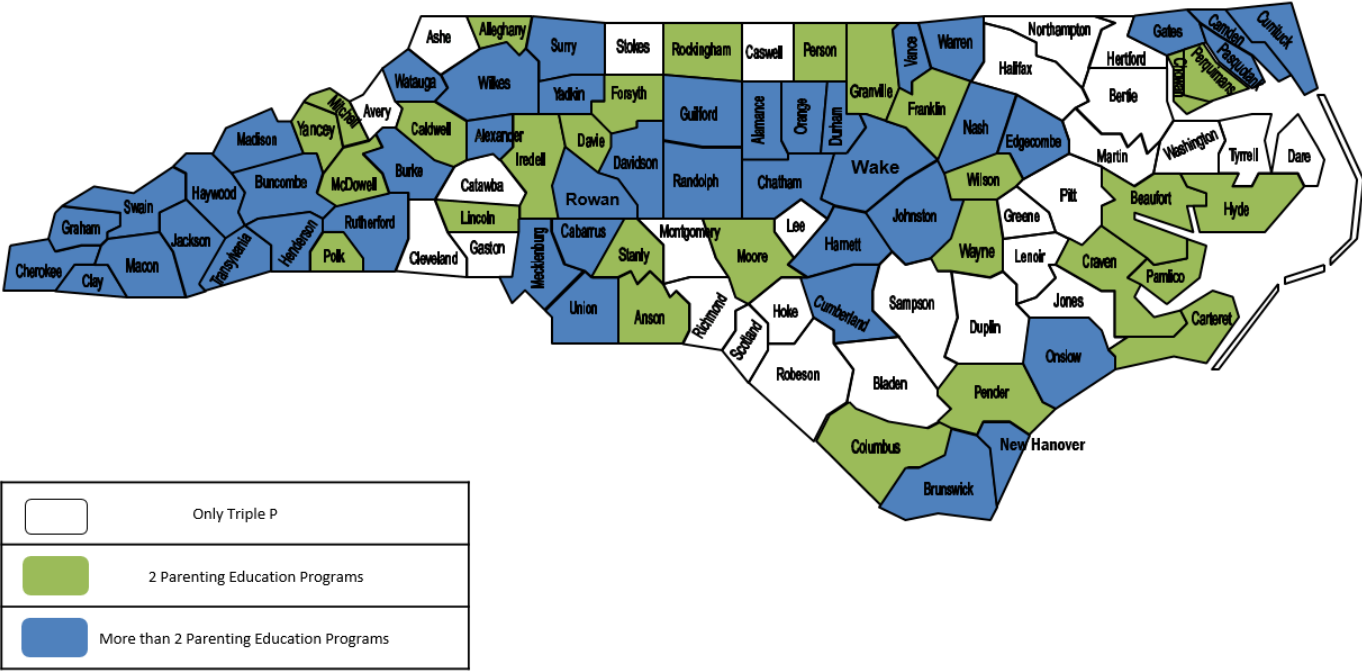
The total, unduplicated count of families served by parenting programs is unknown. However, data is available from NCDPH for the Triple P program, which served 7,780 children and 5,384 caregivers in 2018, for a total of 13,164 clients served.<sup>11</sup>

For more information about evidence-based parenting education programs in North Carolina, view *The Smart Start Resource Guide of Evidence-Based and Evidence-Informed Programs and Practices: A Summary of Research Evidence* at:

[http://www.smartstart.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/SmartStartEBEI\\_Guide\\_052615.pdf](http://www.smartstart.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/SmartStartEBEI_Guide_052615.pdf)



Figure 1: Parenting Education in North Carolina: Programs Funded by Smart Start, NCDSS, and NCDPH



Data retrieved from Smart Start, NCDSS & NCDPH, 2019



**Figure 2: Parenting Education in North Carolina: Programs Funded by Smart Start, NCDSS, and NCDPH**

	Circle of Parents	Facilitated Parent-Child Playgroup	Incredible Years	Motheread-Fatheread	Nurturing Parenting Program	Strengthening Families	Triple P	Other Parenting Education Program	Total Programs
<i>Funding Source</i>	<i>NCDSS, Smart Start</i>	<i>Smart Start</i>	<i>NCDSS, Smart Start</i>	<i>Smart Start</i>	<i>NCDSS, Smart Start</i>	<i>NCDSS</i>	<i>NCDPH, NCDSS, Smart Start</i>	<i>NCDSS, Smart Start</i>	
Alamance		x	x				x		3
Alexander	x	x					x		3
Alleghany	x						x		2
Anson				x			x		2
Ashe							x		1
Avery							x		1
Beaufort		x					x		2
Bertie							x		1
Bladen							x		1
Brunswick	x		x				x		3
Buncombe	x	x	x				x		4
Burke	x			x			x		3
Cabarrus	x					x	x	x	4
Caldwell					x		x		2
Camden	x		x				x		3
Carteret							x	x	2
Caswell							x		1
Catawba							x		1
Chatham			x		x		x		3
Cherokee	x		x				x		3
Chowan				x			x		2
Clay	x		x				x		3
Cleveland							x		1
Columbus						x	x		2
Craven				x			x		2
Cumberland	x				x		x		3
Currituck	x		x				x		3
Dare							x		1
Davidson	x		x				x	x	4
Davie					x		x		2
Duplin							x		1
Durham			x	x			x		3
Edgecombe	x	x	x				x		4
Forsyth							x	x	2
Franklin			x				x		2
Gaston							x		1
Gates	x		x				x		3
Graham	x					x	x		3
Granville			x				x		2
Greene							x		1
Guilford			x	x	x		x		4
Halifax							x		1
Harnett	x	x		x			x		4
Haywood	x		x				x		3
Henderson	x		x				x		3
Hertford							x		1
Hoke							x		1
Hyde		x					x		2
Iredell							x	x	2
Jackson	x		x				x		3
Johnston		x	x	x	x		x		5

	Circle of Parents	Facilitated Parent-Child Playgroup	Incredible Years	Motheread-Fatheread	Nurturing Parenting Program	Strengthening Families	Triple P	Other Parenting Education Program	Total Programs
Jones							x		1
Lee							x		1
Lenoir							x		1
Lincoln					x		x		2
Macon	x		x				x		3
Madison	x	x	x				x		4
Martin							x		1
McDowell	x						x		2
Mecklenburg	x		x		x		x		4
Mitchell		x					x		2
Montgomery							x		1
Moore				x			x		2
Nash	x	x	x				x		4
New Hanover	x						x	x	3
Northampton							x		1
Onslow	x		x		x		x	x	5
Orange	x		x	x			x		4
Pamlico		x					x		2
Pasquotank	x		x				x		3
Pender			x				x		2
Perquimans				x			x		2
Person				x			x		2
Pitt							x		1
Polk	x						x		2
Randolph	x		x				x		3
Richmond							x		1
Robeson							x		1
Rockingham			x				x		2
Rowan		x	x				x		3
Rutherford	x				x		x		3
Sampson							x		1
Scotland							x		1
Stanly				x			x		2
Stokes							x		1
Surry			x		x	x	x		4
Swain	x					x	x		3
Transylvania	x		x				x		3
Tyrrell							x		1
Union	x			x	x		x	x	5
Vance	x		x				x		3
Wake	x				x		x		3
Warren					x		x	x	3
Washington							x		1
Watauga	x		x				x		3
Wayne			x				x		2
Wilkes	x	x		x			x		4
Wilson						x	x		2
Yadkin			x	x		x	x		4
Yancey		x					x		2
Total Programs	38	15	36	16	14	7	100	9	

Data retrieved from Smart Start, NCDSS & NCDPH, 2019

Key:

NCDPH = North Carolina Division of Public Health

NCDSS = North Carolina Division of Social Services

Smart Start = Local Smart Start partnerships for children

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<sup>1</sup> Wilder Research. (2016). The Benefits of Parenting Education: A Literature Review for the Wilder Parent Education Center.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina. (2016). Protective Factors.

<sup>4</sup> Wilder Research, 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Prevent Child Abuse America. (2012). Estimated Annual Cost of Child Abuse and Neglect.

<sup>6</sup> Bowman, S., Pratt, C., Rennekamp, D., and Sektnan, M. (2010). Should We Invest in Parenting Education?

<sup>7</sup> Washington State Institute for Public Policy. (2018). Benefit-Cost Result.

<sup>8</sup> Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina. (2015). Environmental Scan of North Carolina Family Strengthening Programs.

<sup>9</sup> NC DHHS & NCDPH. (2019). "Triple P Spoken Here:" North Carolina Triple P 2010-2017 Evaluation Report.

<sup>10</sup> Data retrieved from Smart Start, 2019; and NC DHHS Division of Social Services, 2019.

<sup>11</sup> NC DHHS Division of Public Health. (2019). Triple P Quarter 4: October-December 2018 Statewide Data Report.