

Early Childhood Education Priorities for the 2024 North Carolina Legislative Session

Access to high-quality child care is essential for children's development and for the growth of a healthy, competitive workforce. Without child care, parents can't work, and children miss out on important early educational experiences that help prepare them for success in kindergarten, reading at grade level, and high school graduation on time.

Parents in every industry need child care to be able to work, and businesses and employers have identified child care as a critical factor in our state's workforce challenges. Every parent in North Carolina deserves the chance to choose safe and reliable early learning opportunities that will allow them to work and support their families while giving their children a strong start. But right now, as federal relief dollars come to an end, our child care system is at the edge of a funding cliff that will be catastrophic. Parents can't afford to pay more, early educators can't afford to make less, and our state's economy can't thrive without a stable child care system.

An increased investment in early education is urgently needed to avoid the precarious impacts of the end of federal funding this June. Our policy priorities for the 2024 Legislative Session focus on investments to support children's healthy development and learning, family economic security and employment, a strong early childhood workforce, and the state's economic prosperity. Together, these policies will help ensure that each and every child in North Carolina is ready to grow, learn, and succeed.

TOP PRIORITY

Extending Child Care Compensation Grants

Since 2021, Child Care Compensation Grants have supported child care programs' efforts to address workforce compensation and turnover in order to increase availability for families. That funding ends in June of this year, which will result in a pay cut for the vast majority of child care teachers, who already earn less than the average worker in fast food, retail and similar industries. Without a state investment to avoid this funding cliff, more child care teachers will leave their jobs, more child care programs will be forced to close, and working parents will find it even harder to find care for their children.

- *A one-time allocation of \$300 million will help child care programs stay open to support young children, working parents, businesses and employers, and our state's economy.*

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED PRIORITIES

Additional measures are needed in order to ensure that more young children and families in every corner of North Carolina have access to high-quality early education:

- *\$95 million annually to fund a new child care subsidy rate structure to implement a "statewide floor" (statewide average rate) that will provide child care programs in all 100 counties with more adequate and equitable rates to serve working families in their communities.*
- *\$10 million annually for Smart Start to provide statewide early childhood infrastructure that supports child care, children's health and developmental outcomes, early literacy, and families with young children.*
- *Support state efforts to ensure that all children have access to a sound, basic education starting in early childhood by investing in the additional early childhood priorities established by the Leandro court case and Comprehensive Remedial Plan, including: increased funding for NC Pre-K; investments in Child Care Subsidy Assistance; and strengthening the NC Infant Toddler Early Intervention Program.*

For more information:

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