



Building Bright Beginnings: North Carolina's Legacy and the Future of Early Care and Education

Kelly Maxwell | 12.10.2025

ABOUT US

Child Trends promotes the well-being of all children and youth through applied research that informs public policies, builds the evidence base for what works, and mines data to identify young people who are overlooked or ill served by public systems. Our research is known for its rigor and objectivity, making Child Trends a uniquely powerful and respected voice for children and youth.

The logo for Child Trends, featuring the text "Child Trends." in a blue sans-serif font. A blue curved line underlines the word "Child" and extends slightly under "Trends.".

childtrends.org



Topics

1. Overview of early care and education (ECE)
2. North Carolina successes
3. Key issues in ECE
4. Action steps



Discussion

- What is your experience with early care and education?
- What do you think are the key issues in early care and education today?

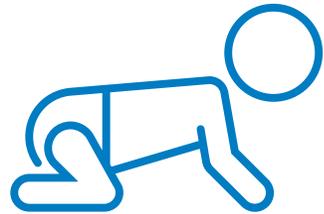
01

**Overview of
Early Care and Education**

Early Childhood



Prenatal



Birth to age 2



Ages 3 to 4



Kindergarten



Age 8

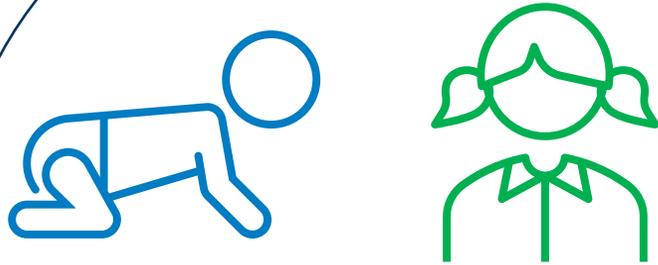
The early childhood years are important for development.

- Responsive relationships and positive experiences build strong brain architecture
- Adversity disrupts the foundations of learning, behavior, and health
- Protective factors in the early years strengthen resilience



Source: Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2016). *From Best Practices to Breakthrough Impacts: A Science-Based Approach to Building a More Promising Future for Young Children and Families*. <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/report/best-practices-breakthrough-impacts/>

Early Care and Education in NC



617,555 children
under age 5 live in
NC (2024)

Some cared for by **parents, relatives, friends and neighbors, others**

Some cared for in **regulated or licensed settings**—
licensed family child care, community-based child care
centers, Head Start, NC Pre-K

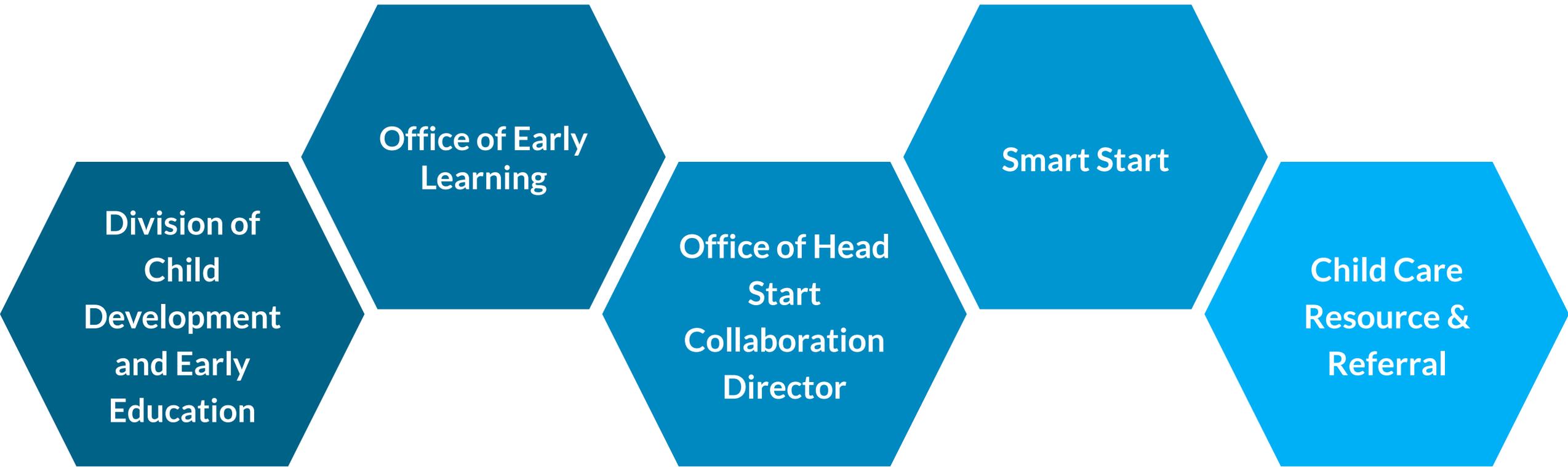
Source: <https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/tables/11689-children-by-age-group#detailed/2/any/false/1096/354,381/22971,22972>

Source for children under 5 in licensed care:

https://ncchildcare.ncdhhs.gov/Portals/0/documents/pdf/S/statistical_detail_report_december_2024.pdf?ver=Hf4pi6LpqsdMCvxnWp_4DQ%3d%3d

Visit NC Child for county-level and statewide data about young children and families: <https://ncchild.org/what-we-do/insights/data/>

Key ECE Organizations in NC



Funding of B-5 Early Care and Education (ECE)



Federal
Government



State
Government



Local
Government



Families

Understanding NC's Funding for ECE

- Most ECE funding comes from the federal government
- There are several funding streams dispersed across multiple agencies

Resources

- Learn more about “who’s who”: www.ednc.org/whos-who-north-carolinas-early-care-and-learning-landscape/
- Learn more about ECE finance: [Funding Sources for Early Care and Education in North Carolina](#)

Early Care and Education Benefits...

Children



Families

Economy



Parental and Economic Impact of ECE

— \$5.65B

THE UNTAPPED POTENTIAL:
Childcare issues result in an estimated \$5.65 billion annual loss for North Carolina's economy.

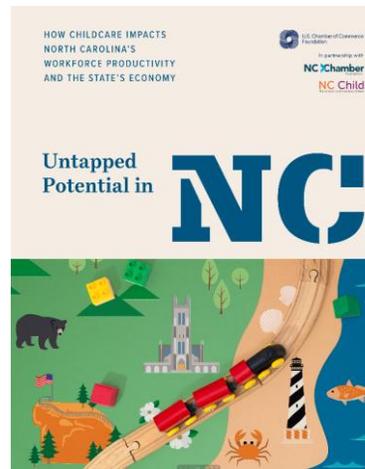
35%

of parents that experienced disruptions to their employment in the past year reported leaving the workforce as a direct result of issues with childcare.

46%

of parents attending school or work training needed to make a significant adjustment to their schedule due to childcare issues in the past year.

Source: <https://ncchamber.com/foundation/untapped-potential-report/> ; p. 5



Children's Learning and Development Benefits from High-Quality Early Care and Education: A Summary of the Evidence



Suggested citation: CCEEPRA Research Translation (2024). *Highlight Slides for the Children's Learning and Development Benefits from High-Quality Early Care and Education: A Summary of the Evidence* [PowerPoint slides]. OPRE Report #2025-066. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

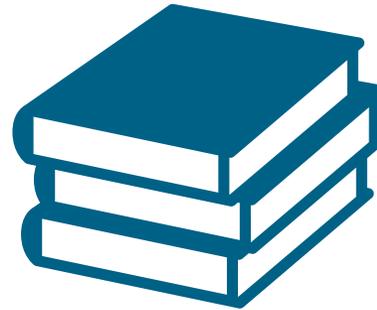
The full brief is available at: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/childrens-learning-and-development-benefits-high-quality-early-care-and-education>

What Aspects of ECE Quality Lead to Stronger Developmental Benefits for Children?

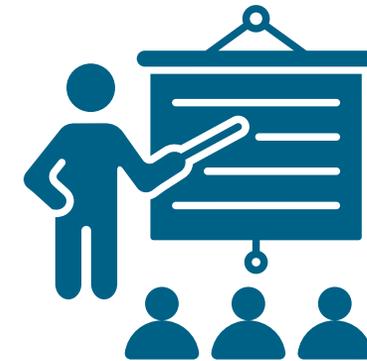
Research shows three aspects of ECE quality are most important for children's development:



Educator-Child Relationships



Effective Teaching and Use of Curricula



Educator Preparation and Professional Development

The full brief is available at: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/childrens-learning-and-development-benefits-high-quality-early-care-and-education>

How Does High-Quality ECE Benefit Young Children?



Cognitive benefits

Improved cognitive skills, like vocabulary or literacy, math, reasoning, and later academic achievement



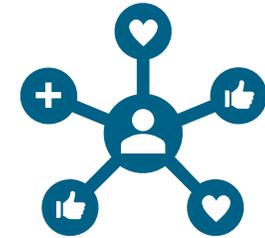
Social and Behavioral Benefits

Improved social-emotional development and self-regulation; reduced behavior problems



Dosage matters

Participating for more years is associated with greater benefits



Context matters

Children's development is also affected by their health, families' well-being, neighborhood resources, and many other factors

The full brief is available at: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/childrens-learning-and-development-benefits-high-quality-early-care-and-education>

02

North Carolina Successes

Abecedarian Project



Media Mentions

[How Preschool Can Make You Smarter and Healthier](#)

NOVA Next (PBS)

[Project to Improve Poor Children's Intellect Led to Better Health, Data Show](#)

The New York Times

[A video clip of FPG's Abecedarian Project from the documentary My Brilliant Brain is now available to view online](#)

ABC's Brilliant Brain

The Abecedarian Project

FPG's Abecedarian Project, one of the world's oldest and [most oft-cited early childhood education programs](#), marked its 42nd anniversary last year with groundbreaking findings from principal investigator [Frances A. Campbell](#), Nobel laureate James J. Heckman, and their colleagues—as well as several new international initiatives that showcase adaptations of the curriculum that the project first developed four decades ago.

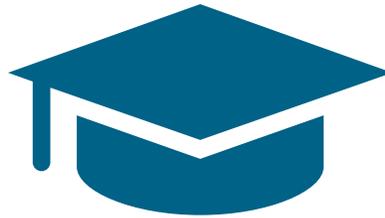
Since its inception and [early leadership from Craig Ramey, Joseph Sparling, and others](#), the Abecedarian Project has become synonymous with [positive, long-term effects of high-quality early care and education](#), particularly with regard to the power of early intervention to surmount some of the disadvantages of poverty. Children born between 1972 and 1977 were randomly assigned as infants to either the early educational intervention group or the control group.

Source: <https://abc.fpg.unc.edu/>

Abecedarian Project: Key Findings



Higher achievement test scores and lower levels of grade retention in school

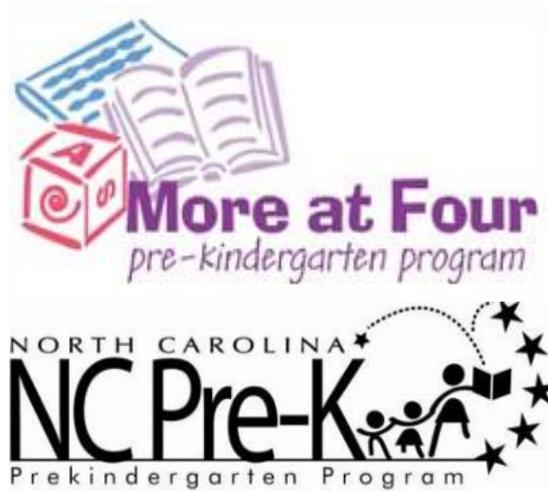


More likely to hold a Bachelor's degree, hold a job, higher earnings at age 30



Lower rates of pre-hypertension in their mid-30s

Other NC ECE Successes



Star Rated License Sample

Shows the number of stars earned (shaded) out of the number of stars possible (blank)

Shows the name and physical location of the program

Shows how many points the program earned in each of the two components

Shows basic licensing information such as number of children allowed, ages allowed and any restrictions

State of North Carolina
Department of Health and Human Services
Division of Child Development

Three Star Child Care License

★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆

ABC CHILD CARE CENTER
123 ANYWHERE ST
RALEIGH, NC 27777

In each area rated, this facility earned:

Staff Education: 4 out of 7 points
Program Standards: 4 out of 7 points
Quality Point: 1 out of 1 point
Blended Program: 9 out of 15 points
Total: 9 out of 15 points

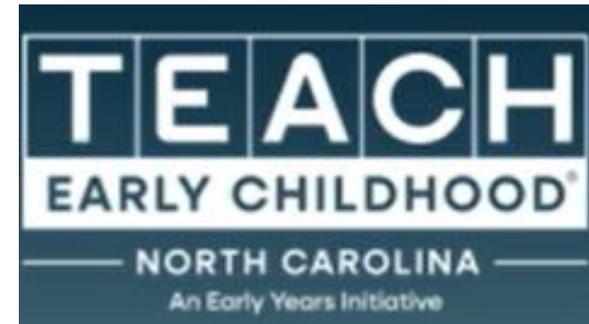
ID Number: 92999999
Type of Facility: Center
Issued to: CHLOE CARE, SUZIE

Age Range: 0 - 12 years
Capacity: 14 total, 50 2nd shift 0 2nd shift 0
Effective Date: July 1, 2007
Restrictions:
Infants care only
Children in care on ground level only

In accordance with Article 17, Chapter 110 of the North Carolina General Statutes, the above named child care facility is issued a valid license. Licenses only from an accredited program in the state, based upon their cumulative points in the three categories above.

This license must be displayed in a prominent place in the facility to be available and shown to each child's parent/guardian when the child is enrolled. This license number, length, and expiration date only apply to the facility's operation and does not guarantee the quality of the care which a center and/or provider receives from the Division of Child Development in the area of information or resolution.

Current license status, services, Department of Health & Human Services Robert W. Vanderkay, Director, Division of Child Development



03

Key Issues in ECE

Access to ECE



Other Key Issues in ECE



Source for educator wages: <https://www.earlyyearsnc.org/research/2023-north-carolina-child-care-workforce-study/>

Source to learn more about early childhood working conditions: <https://www.nationaleceworkforcecenter.org/key-topic/work-environment-standards/>

04

Action Steps

Action Steps



Talk with your family, friends, and colleagues about ECE



Ask questions and share your ideas

- Local Smart Start partnership
- County commission meeting
- Statewide opportunities for input



Think about what you could do within your organization

Thank you!

Kmaxwell@childtrends.org

www.childtrends.org

Child Trends[®]

