



Helping children and families across North Carolina recover from the impacts of COVID-19

Families have had their lives upended by the COVID-19 pandemic, and these disruptions will have continued effects on children's development, families' economic security, and the economy as a whole.



North Carolina's child care providers face precarious financial positions because of COVID-19, threatening parents' access to affordable, high-quality care.

As of December 2020, approximately 90% of North Carolina's child care providers were open, but child care enrollment levels statewide are at around 60% of their pre-pandemic levels. With thin profit margins even in good times, this is a financially unsustainable position that could lead to widespread closures, which would harm families' ability to access care. On average, child care providers are facing a 47% increase in operating costs during the pandemic.

The Importance of Birth to 5

Research shows experiences during early childhood literally shape the structure of the brain, creating the foundation for learning, health and success. Smart Start brings together all the people involved in a young child's life—families, teachers, doctors, and many others—to ensure every child has all they need for healthy growth and development.

Access to child care is critical to North Carolina's economy.

Nationwide 32% of employers have seen employees leave the workforce due to COVID-19, and 50% of parents who have not returned to the workforce cite child care as a reason. In North Carolina, access to care is limited; 21% of parents who are not using child care during the pandemic report that it is because they can't find a provider. Since the pandemic began, as many as half of North Carolina parents report missing work as a result of child care issues.

Stresses on families during COVID-19 heighten long-term risks to young children.

As of December 2020, 32% of North Carolina parents and caregivers reported feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge more than half the days or nearly every day. New data from the Rapid Assessment of Pandemic Impact on Development Early Childhood Household Survey Project (RAPID-EC Project) shows caregiver distress is cascading down to young children in ways science shows can be toxic in the short- and long-term.

2021 Appropriation Request for Children and Families

Smart Start Child Care Support: \$15 Million

- ✓ Supporting comprehensive early childhood workforce supports like the WAGE\$ program, health benefits for child care providers, and professional development supplements, reaching 1,080 teachers serving 12,500 children
- ✓ Increasing investments in child care quality for 220 providers, reaching more than 9,400 additional children

Smart Start Supporting Child Health: \$3.75 Million

- ✓ Supporting programs that ensure healthy development and promote social-emotional health and resilience, reaching 4,432 children

Smart Start Family Support: \$7.5 Million

- ✓ Expanding access to home visiting and parenting education programs that connect parents with resources and information to help them raise children in a nurturing environment to an additional 1,050 families
- ✓ Promoting early literacy and reading skills to an additional 20,500 children

Smart Start Subsidy: \$3.75 Million

- ✓ Making child care affordable to more families with young children so parents can get back to work and child care providers can keep their high-quality early education programs open

The Smart Start Network

