

NC Early Childhood Action Plan: Creating Safe and Nurturing Families, Schools, and Communities

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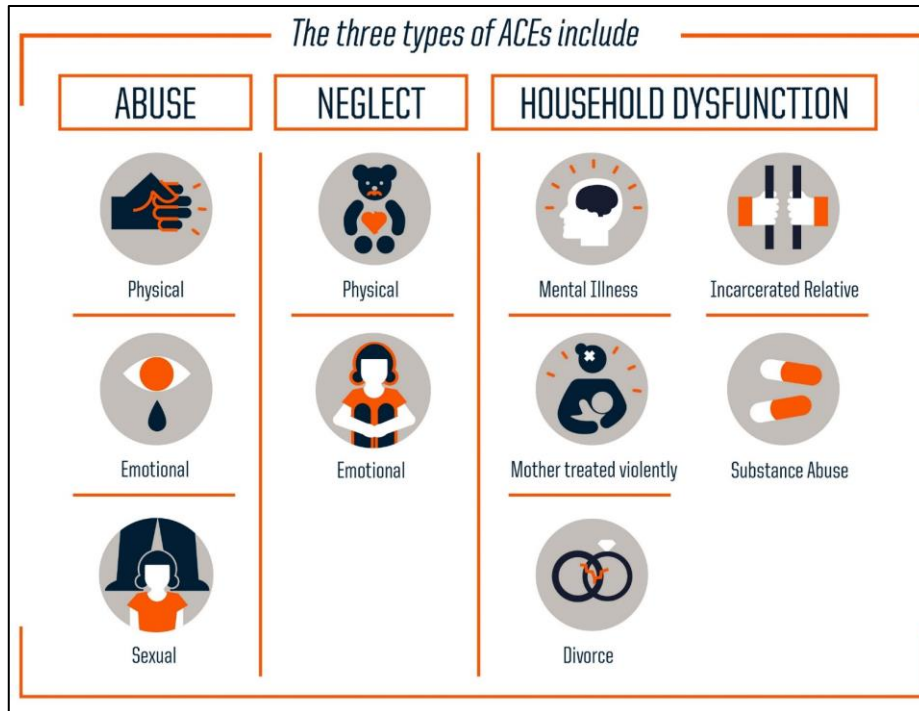
A young child with dark, curly hair is focused on playing with a wooden abacus toy. The child is wearing a blue and white striped shirt. In the foreground, there are several colorful plastic blocks in red and yellow. To the left, a tall, colorful stacking ring toy is visible. The background is softly blurred, showing more toys and a blue storage bin. The overall scene is warm and captures a moment of early childhood play.

We know Early Childhood
matters

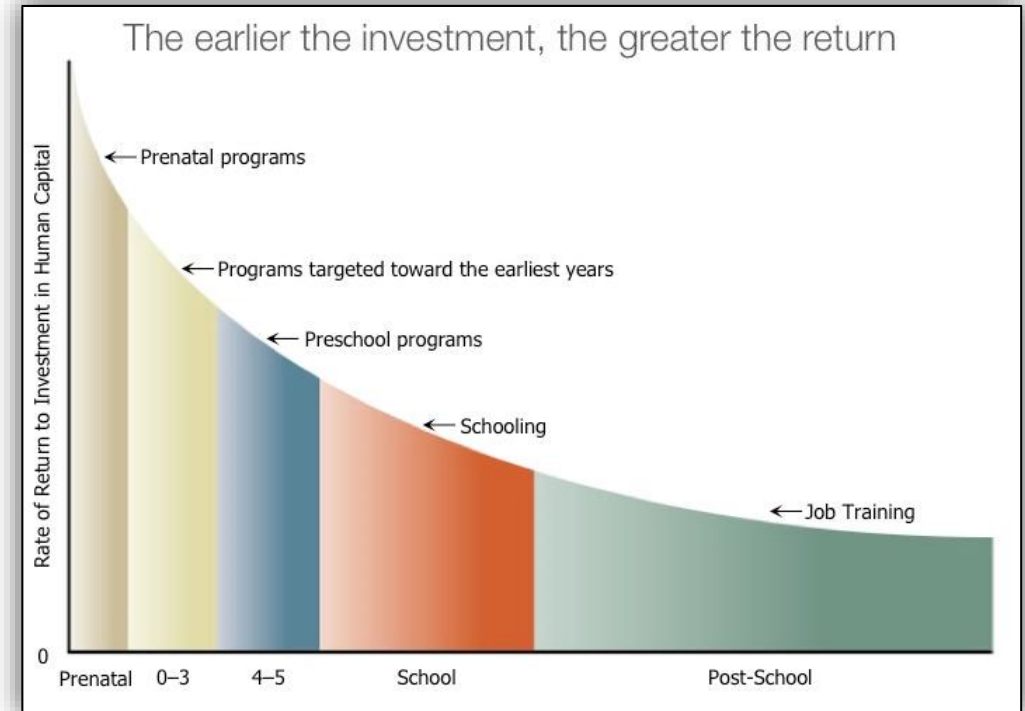
Brains are Built, Not Born

- **Early experiences are built into children's bodies**—shaping brain architecture and impacting how biological systems develop
- Every experience a baby has forms a neural connection in the brain at a rate of **more than a million synapses per second** in the early years.
- **Not all neural connections will last.** Connections that get used more strengthen, and those used less fade.
- Positive early experiences **build a strong foundation** for learning and future health.

The “Why” in Two Parts:



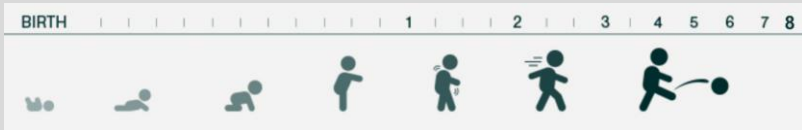
- Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences



- Sound Economic Investment

Our Early Childhood Lens For Today's Conversation


Birth – 8 Years-Old
(typically through third grade)



Age Range



*Health, Child Welfare, and
Early Education*

A young girl with dark hair in pigtails, wearing a white t-shirt, is the central focus. She is looking towards the camera with a slight smile. In the background, a classroom environment is visible with other children and adults. A boy with blonde hair is standing next to her, and a woman is partially visible behind him. To the right, another girl is sitting at a table. The background wall is decorated with colorful cutouts of Santa Claus and other festive figures. The text "We are building off of NC's strengths to tackle our biggest challenges" is overlaid in white, sans-serif font across the middle of the image.

We are building off of NC's
strengths to tackle our
biggest challenges

NC's History of National Leadership in Early Childhood

T.E.A.C.H.
Scholarships

1990

*Link continuing education
with higher compensation
for early educators*

Smart Start

1993

*Comprehensive, public/private
planning and funding approach
to early childhood supports*

Quality
Rating
System

1999

*One of first in nation for early
learning licensing, quality, and
improvement*

NC's Challenges for Young Children

Disparities in Infant Mortality

*African American births face nearly **2.5X** the infant mortality rate of white births in NC*

Food Insecurity

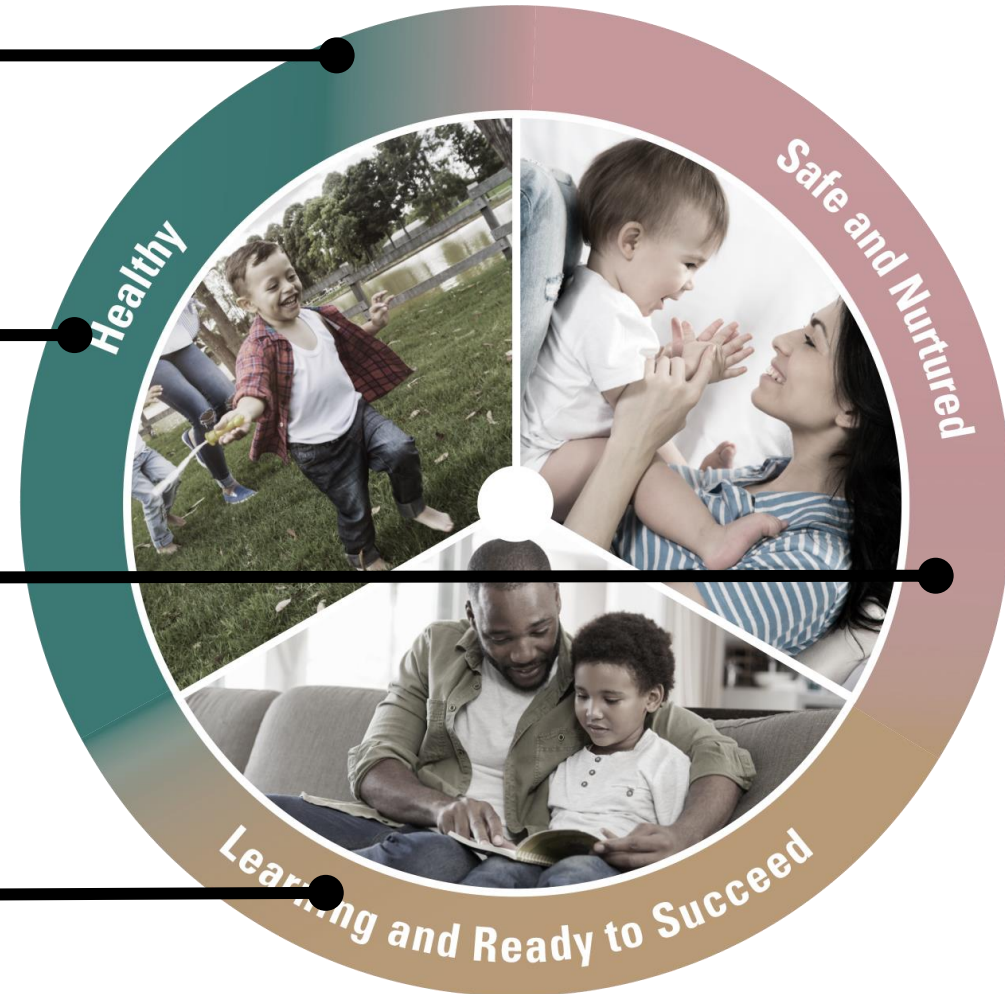
***1 in 5** NC children face food insecurity
– bottom 10 states in the nation*

Children in Foster Care

*Half of NC children ages 4 and 5 in foster care will have spent **over 1000** days in the system before they are adopted*

Reading Proficiency

*In 2019, only **36%** of NC 4th graders read proficiently and racial & ethnic disparities are profound*



A close-up photograph of a baby lying on its back on a colorful, horizontally striped blanket. The baby has light brown hair and is looking directly at the camera with a wide, open-mouthed smile, showing its teeth. The baby is wearing a white short-sleeved shirt with blue trim. The background is slightly blurred, showing more of the striped blanket and a hint of a purple object in the upper right corner. The text "What's the Plan?" is overlaid in the center of the image in a white, sans-serif font.

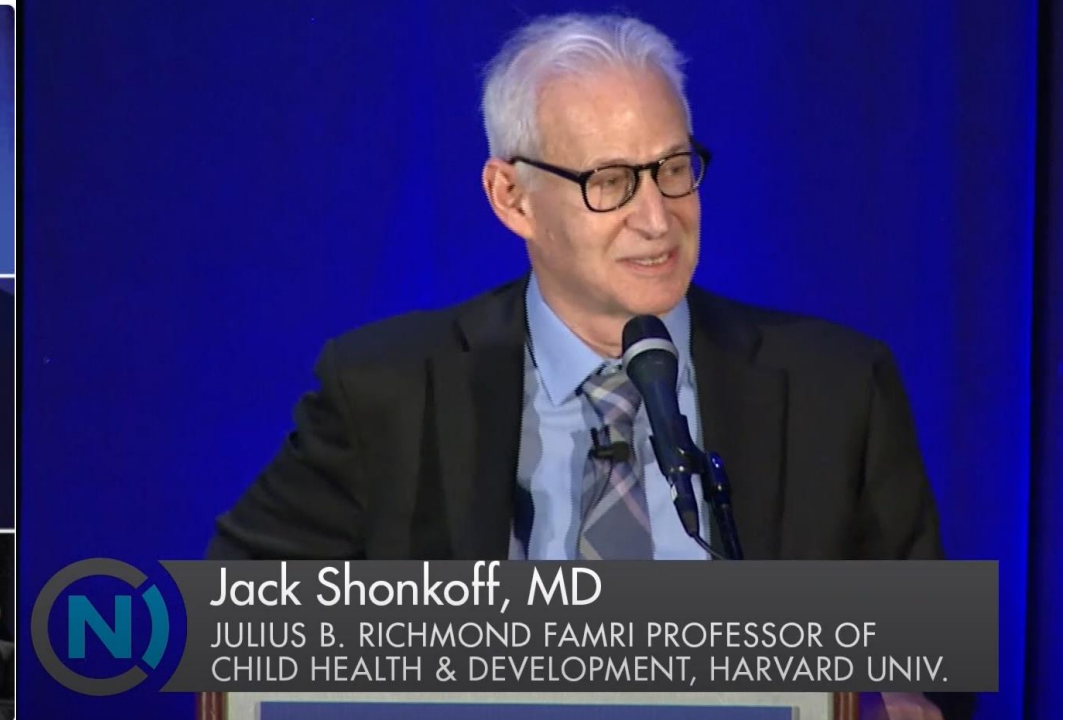
What's the Plan?



NC Early Childhood Action Plan

- 10 data-informed goals for children birth through age eight
- Targeted framework to galvanize public and private action by 2025
- Governor Roy Cooper's 2018 Executive Order called for a statewide early childhood strategic plan
- Input from more than 1,500 people representative of a diversity of perspectives, including parents, families, healthcare providers, child care providers, educators, school administrators, child advocacy groups and researchers
- Focuses on alleviating inequity across North Carolina

Summit to Launch – February 27, 2019



Jack Shonkoff, MD

JULIUS B. RICHMOND FAMRI PROFESSOR OF
CHILD HEALTH & DEVELOPMENT, HARVARD UNIV.



Our Vision for NC's Children

All North Carolina children
will get a healthy start
and develop to their full
potential in safe and
nurturing families, schools
and communities.

Our Guiding Principles



Children and families are at the center of our work.



Brain and developmental science are fundamental.



Alleviate inequity to ensure that all of North Carolina's children can reach their fullest potential.



Build upon existing strengths and partnerships in early childhood systems.



Set bold priorities and achievable goals for North Carolina's young children.



Track progress toward all goals, ensuring transparency, accountability, and good stewardship of resources.

Early Childhood Action Plan Structure

Each goal features:

- Commitment
- 2025 Target(s)
- Sub – Targets

Each category features:

- Strategies

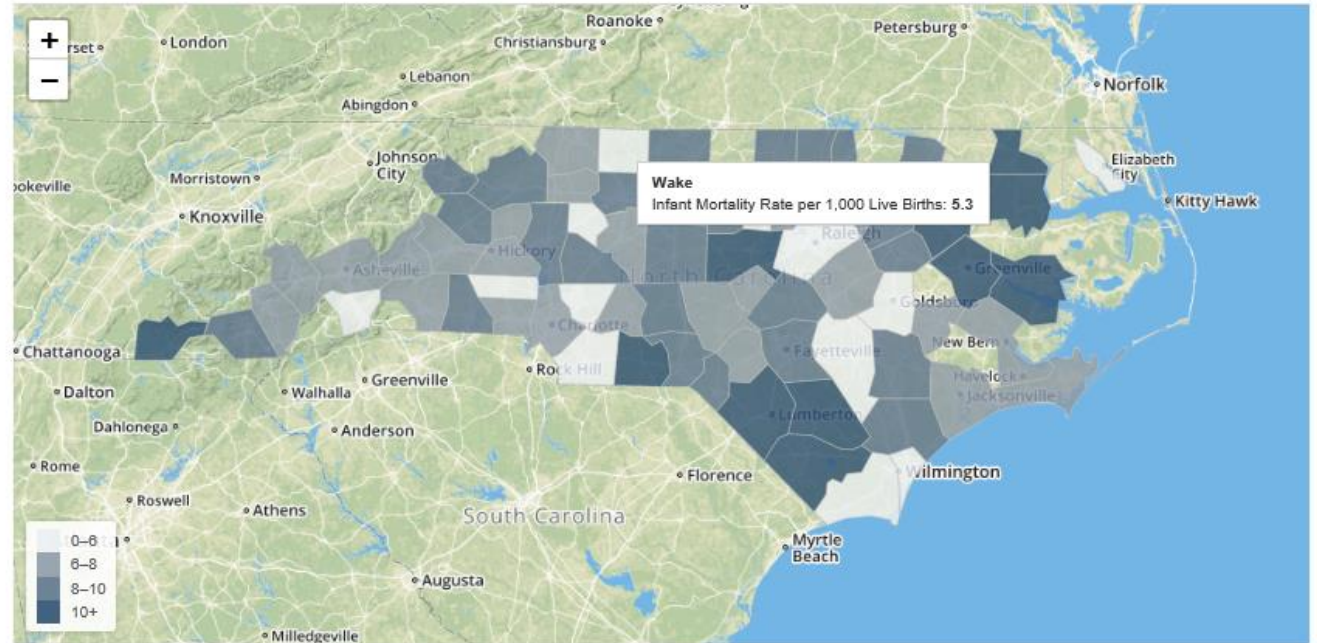
Online state-level data dashboard and county reports



Early Childhood Action Plan: Data Dashboard

- Data on over 50 measures
- Interactive
- Updated regularly
- Open to the public
- Visit *ncdhhs.gov/early-childhood*

Infant Mortality Rates in North Carolina by County, 5-year Estimates 2013-2017



Data Source: State Center for Health Statistics (SCHS), Division of Public Health (DPH), NC Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS)

*Technical note: The above scale represents infant mortality rates, calculated as the number of infant (under 1 year of age) deaths divided by the total number of live births during the same time period. Rates are shown in infant deaths per 1,000 live births. Unshaded counties are those that had infant mortality rates based on small numbers (fewer than 10 deaths) and were therefore considered unstable.

County Level Data Reports

- 100 printable PDF reports available online
- Requests from counties for easier access to the data prioritized in the plan at the local level
- Desire to use county level data for:
 - Strategic planning
 - Peer county comparisons
 - Meeting existing data requirements for other local assessments





Healthy

Children are healthy at birth and thrive in environments that support their optimal health and well-being

Healthy | 2025 GOALS



1. HEALTHY BABIES



2. PREVENTIVE HEALTH SERVICES



3. FOOD SECURITY



1. HEALTHY BABIES

Babies across North Carolina from all backgrounds will have a healthy start in their first year of life.

- NC has the 11th highest infant mortality rate in the country.
- The African American infant mortality rate in NC is over twice as high as the white infant mortality rate.

2025 Target

Decrease the statewide infant mortality disparity ratio from 2.5 to 1.92, according to data provided by the State Center for Health Statistics

Sub-Targets

Percent of babies born at a low birth weight

Percent of young women with a preventive health visit in last year

Percent of infants who are ever breastfed

Percent of mothers indicating their pregnancy was intended

Percent of families living at or below 200% of the federal poverty level

Healthy | 2025 GOALS



1. HEALTHY BABIES



2. PREVENTIVE HEALTH SERVICES



3. FOOD SECURITY



Safe and Nurtured

Children grow confident, resilient and independent in safe, stable, and nurturing families, schools and communities

Safe and Nurtured | 2025 GOALS



4. SAFE AND SECURE HOUSING



5. SAFE AND NURTURING RELATIONSHIPS



6. PERMANENT FAMILIES FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE



7. SOCIAL EMOTIONAL HEALTH AND RESILIENCE



Learning and Ready to Succeed

Children experience the conditions they need to build strong brain architecture and skills that support their success in school and life

Learning & Ready to Succeed | 2025 GOALS



8. HIGH-QUALITY EARLY LEARNING



9. ON TRACK FOR SCHOOL SUCCESS



10. READING AT GRADE LEVEL

Strategies to Take Action | Examples from the Plan

- Closing the insurance coverage gap to ensure more families have access to physical, mental, and oral healthcare services.
- Making it easier for young women to visit a primary care provider more regularly, which can help support future healthy pregnancies.
- Promoting evidence-based home visiting and parenting education classes.
- Hiring more staff in supportive roles such as school counselors, social workers, and school nurses.
- Providing better care for mothers facing depression.
- Providing increased access to research-based mental health services to children and adults who need them.

Learn more & **Take Action** for NC's Young Children!



- Visit ncdhhs.gov/early-childhood
- Review the Action Plan
- Examine the Data
- **Come Together** With and For Your Community

A young boy with dark hair, wearing a blue and white plaid shirt, is pointing his right index finger towards the viewer. He has a joyful expression, with a wide smile showing his teeth. The background is a rustic wooden fence or wall with vertical planks. The overall lighting is soft and natural.

Where are we now?

Partners Across the State Are Aligning Efforts | Examples



NCDHHS Cross-Divisional Fall 2019
Workshops on Early Childhood Goals

- **Statewide Non-Profits and Advocates:** Prevent Child Abuse NC, Kindergarten entry and Social Emotional Workgroup with NC Early Childhood Foundation, Think Babies Alliance, and others
- **County Leaders:** Yadkin, Transylvania, Durham, Cabarrus, and others
- **Research Institutions and Higher Education:** Duke University, UNC-CH, Community Colleges Across NC, and others
- **Endorsements:** State Board of Education, Governor's Education Cabinet, Governor's Commission on Access to a Sound Basic Education

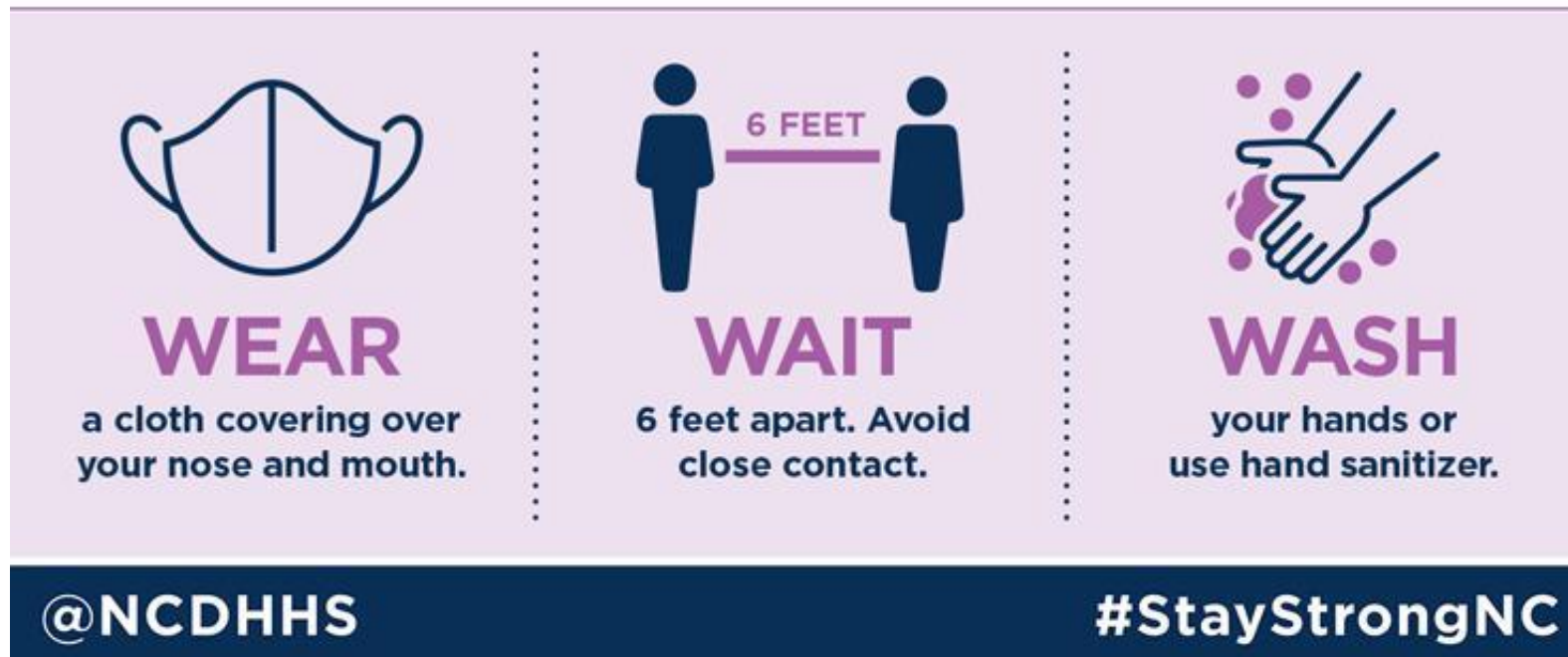
Leveraging Federal Funding to Support Early Childhood



Preschool Development Grant
\$40.2 Million for
NC's Young Children

COVID-19 – Is there a role for the Early Childhood Action Plan?

If you leave home, know your Ws!



Yes!

Child Care & K – 3 Education

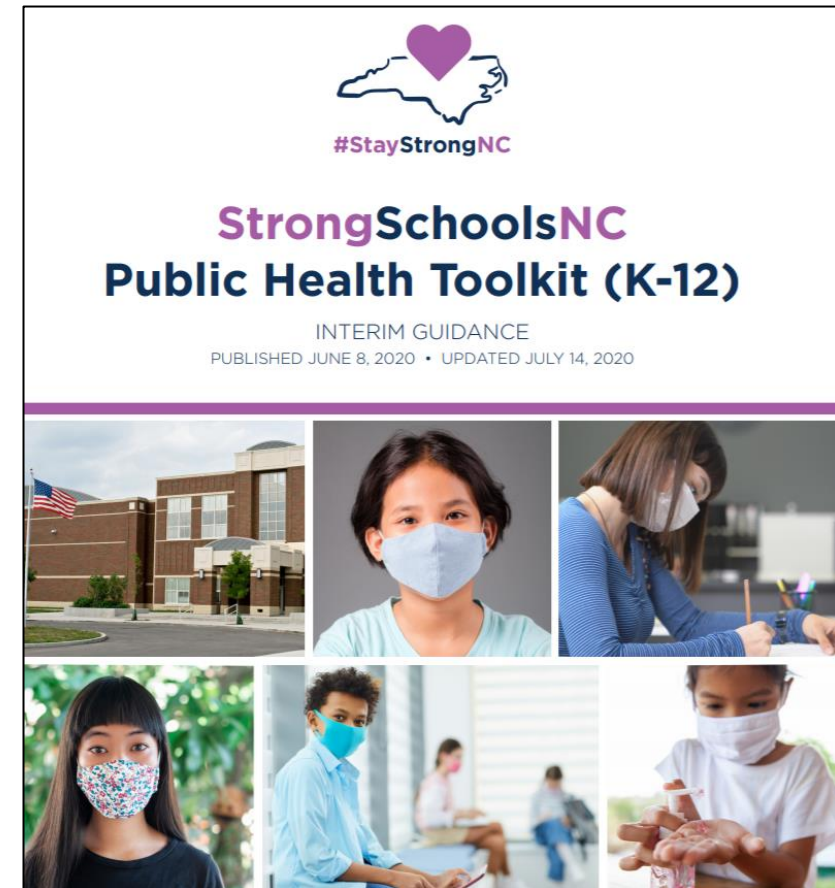


Child Care & K – 12 Schools Guidance

ChildCare Strong Public Health Guidance



StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Guidance & Memorandum on Pre-K



NC has provided health & safety guidance to ensure child care programs and public schools can keep children and staff safe.

Requirements & Recommendations:

- Cloth face coverings required for students K – 12 and all staff
- Daily screening for children and staff
- Cleaning protocols
- Immediately isolate staff or children with symptoms and send them home
- Consult with health department about potential exposures to COVID-19

For Parents/Caregivers

NC as launched a child care hotline.

Families can call [Child Care Hotline](tel:1-888-600-1685) to find local care options, available Monday – Friday from 8AM-5PM.

**Do you need help finding
child care near you?**

Call 1-888-600-1685
for local options.



**¿Necesita ayuda para
encontrar un centro de
cuidado infantil cercano?**

Llame al 1-888-600-1685 para
encontrar opciones locales.



For Parents/Caregivers

NC launched an Emergency Child Subsidy Care Program for essential workers.



- Launched for April 1 through May 31
- Covered child care for over 17,000 children of essential workers in April
- Signs ups ended May 8th when the “essential business” designation ended with Executive Order 138
- Child care providers will continue to get paid for emergency child care subsidy through end of May

For Child Care Programs

NC has paid bonuses to child care staff working on the front lines in April and May.



**Teaching Staff:
\$950/month**



**Non-Teaching Staff:
\$525/month**

For Child Care Programs

NC has provided Pre-K remote learning guidance.

All NC Pre-K programs were expected to provide remote or in-person learning services to NC Pre-K children through the end of the program year

During this time, **families should expect:**



Real-time contact (phone, Zoom, FaceTime) with Pre-K teachers at least 2x per week



No end of year preschool assessments while children are learning remotely



End of year discussion with teacher on child's growth at end of year (including strengths and any areas of concern)

For Child Care Programs

NC conducted an interim survey of NC Pre-K sites to understand how they were providing remote learning, and will release an end-of-year survey report .

- Interim survey results found:
 - 72% of NC Pre-K sites said they were serving children from families for whom English was not their primary, home language
 - Among these sites, about 1 in 4 children enrolled came from families for whom English was not their primary, home language
- NCDHHS will conduct an end of year survey to understand what worked well and what could be improved with remote learning and family engagement

Nutritious Food



School Nutrition Sites

NC has provided meals to children and families at school and community sites across the state.

- Provided over 25 million meals at ~1,000 sites since March 16th
- Meal sites will continue to provide meals through summer, as we transition to school reopening



Finding Meals For Your Family

NC has worked with partners to set up a texting tool to find nearby meal sites.

Do you need help finding meals for your child?



TEXT "FOODNC" TO 877-877

Texting powered by No Kid Hungry.
This institution is an equal opportunity provider.



¿Necesita ayuda para encontrar comidas para sus niños?



ENVIE UN TEXTO A "COMIDA" AL 877-877

Texto impulsado por No Kid Hungry.
Esta institución es un proveedor de igualdad de oportunidades.



Pandemic-EBT

NC is helping families buy food if their children who usually get free or reduced meals at school.

- About 900,000 children will qualify for benefits
- Families will receive up to \$371 per child on an EBT card to help buy food for children
- Families do not need to apply - will either receive an EBT card in the mail or will get more money on an existing EBT card over next 3 weeks
- Can use EBT card at most grocery stores



Maximum Food Benefits for Families

NC is providing families more money to buy food.

- Families who are currently enrolled in Food and Nutrition Services will receive the maximum amount allowed for March, April, and May. (based on their household size).
- NCDHHS issued ~\$76-\$80 million in benefits to over 420,000 households with over 867,000 individuals in both March and April.
- NCDHHS began issuing May benefits on 5/22 and staggered over 10 days.

Online Purchasing for Families Receiving FNS

NC is helping families buy food online to promote social distancing.



- Families enrolled in FNS can now order food online for curbside pickup or delivery at retailers like Walmart and Amazon using FNS benefits
- In first two weeks of implementation, FNS participants spent over \$2.5 million buying groceries online using EBT cards

Mental Health



Hope4NC and Hope4Healers

NC has launched helplines to provide mental health support for those who need it.

Hope4NC:

- For all North Carolinians
- Available 24/7
- 1-855-587-3463



Hope4Healers:

- For health care workers, first responders, child care workers experiencing stress from being on the front lines
- Available 24/7
- 919-226-2002

Contact Information

Questions about the Early Childhood Action Plan?

Reach out to our NCDHHS Early Childhood Team

ECAP@dhhs.nc.gov

Questions about school reopening?

Email StrongSchoolsNC@dhhs.nc.gov

Contact Information

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