

Early Childhood Education Priorities for the 2021 North Carolina Legislative Session

The COVID-19 pandemic has made it clear to everyone that child care is essential – for children's healthy development, for working families, and for our economic recovery from this crisis and future prosperity. But child care is not funded like it's essential, and this crisis has devastated the child care industry in North Carolina. Even before the pandemic, child care was unavailable and unaffordable for many parents, providers operated on razor-thin margins, and early education teachers were woefully underpaid for their important work. COVID-19 has worsened all of these challenges facing the child care system and further increased inequities for children, families, and communities.

Our early childhood policy priorities for the 2021 Legislative Session focus on increasing early learning opportunities for all young children and their families in every county in North Carolina. We continue to promote policies to advance the quality, availability, and affordability of North Carolina's early education system, which pre-COVID served more than 250,000 young children and their families. Our policy priorities are actionable, evidenced-based, and solution-oriented, and they are essential for young children's healthy development and learning, family employment, and the state's economic prosperity.

Child Care System Stabilization and Improvements

Continue to develop and fund effective short-term strategies to stabilize the child care industry, which has been severely damaged by the COVID-19 pandemic, so that all children and families in every county have access to high-quality early learning programs.

Workforce Compensation

Increase salary compensation for early childhood educators with degrees in early education by establishing a state-level, state-wide salary supplement program via the Child Care WAGE\$ and Infant Toddler Educator AWARD\$ programs, and by creating a state-level salary initiative through the state's QRIS and child care subsidy system.

Child Care Subsidy Rates Improvements

Develop and fund a new child care subsidy rates structure that provides child care programs in all 100 counties with adequate and equitable rates that incorporate the true cost of care, including workforce compensation and benefits.

Child Care Subsidy Assistance

Expand child care subsidy assistance for eligible low-income working families and their children on the waitlist so that parents have opportunities to work and their children can access quality early learning opportunities to support their healthy development and school readiness.

Leandro Court Case Implementation of the State Action Plan

Support state efforts to ensure that all children have access to a sound basic education starting in early childhood by investing in the early childhood priorities established by the Leandro court case and state action plan, including: expansion of Smart Start and NC Pre-K programs; early learning salary supplements for the early childhood workforce; and strengthening the NC Infant Toddler Early Intervention Program.

For more information:

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