

# Attaining Educational Equity in Forsyth County through High-Quality Pre-K

## THE PRE•K PRIORITY

### A Call to Action



All children have the right  
to equitable learning opportunities  
that help them achieve their full potential  
in school, work, and life.

# Steering Committee

The Pre-K Priority Steering Committee oversees and coordinates activities leading to the adoption and implementation of an expanded, high-quality Pre-K system in Forsyth County by:

- Providing leadership for work groups as the groups refine, add, and implement recommendations
- Reviewing and approving recommendations for the implementation, administration and evaluation of an expanded Pre-K system
- Guiding and supporting education and advocacy activities
- Increasing the number of individuals, community groups, organizations, and civic leaders committed to Pre-K expansion



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**The Pre-K Priority** coalition was formed in June 2014 with the goal of providing every four-year-old in Forsyth County with the opportunity to attend a high-quality Pre-K program. Previous Pre-K Priority publications have documented the need to increase the number and improve the quality of Pre-K programs in the county. Our studies and reports have documented that Pre-K providers are prepared to increase the quantity and quality of their programs. Most importantly, surveys have found that 90% of parents with young children would enroll their children in affordable, accessible, high-quality Pre-K programs were they available.

This “Case Statement for High-Quality Pre-K” addresses the urgent need for Forsyth County to develop and adopt a formal community plan for establishing a high-quality Pre-K system in Forsyth County. Key considerations in creating a Pre-K plan include:

### **A Commitment to Equity**

A high-quality Pre-K system is based on the principle of equity. A fair and inclusive educational system ensures that all students have what they need to succeed in the classroom and beyond. Equity assures fair treatment, access, opportunities, and supports to students to accelerate achievement and attain academic excellence for students of color. It is a powerful means for creating a more just and equitable society.

### **Providing High-Quality Programs**

Numerous studies have documented the significant outcomes that high-quality Pre-K programs have achieved in relation to academic performance and success in later life, particularly for students of color. It cannot be overemphasized that these results entirely depend on operating Pre-K programs that meet high-quality standards.

### **Acting on Longstanding Inequities**

For the past decade assessments of school readiness and third-grade academic proficiency of children in the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools (WS/FCS) have registered yawning and persistent disparities among children of color and economic disadvantage. These results are the product of a systemic failure to address social and racial inequities.

### **Securing Sufficient State Funding**

The North Carolina Pre-K Program (NC Pre-K) is the primary source of public funding for quality Pre-K programs that benefit low-income and minority children. Forsyth County ranks at or near the bottom of North Carolina counties in terms of the funding it receives to enroll the more than 2,700 children in the county that are eligible for NC Pre-K. In 2019-20 only 27% of eligible children in the county were enrolled as compared with 67% in neighboring Guilford County.

### **Making Strategic Local Investments**

Several urban counties in NC are allocating local tax dollars to make significant, strategic investments to increase the availability and quality of their Pre-K programs. Local government in Forsyth County has yet to make such investments.

### **Establishing a Formal Community Plan**

Urban counties have also developed and adopted formal plans, commissioned by elected officials, for building a system of high-quality Pre-K programs. Forsyth County has yet to create such a plan.

### **Exercising the Political Will**

At the time of this writing, the COVID-19 pandemic has put a spotlight on early childhood programs as an essential resource for families and for a resilient and vibrant economy. The pandemic has also laid bare the extent and depth of racial injustice in our society. The time has arrived for our civic leaders and elected officials to exercise the political will to secure the financial resources required to establish an expanded, high-quality Pre-K system in Forsyth County in order to foster a more just, equitable, and prosperous community.

# What is Equity?

The idea of equity calls for “fairness or justice in the way people are treated.” In an equitable society, everyone is provided with what they need to reach their full potential, recognizing that each person has a unique experience and starts from a unique place.

In the context of societal systems, **equality** and **equity** refer to similar but slightly different concepts. When a group focuses on equality, everyone has the same rights, opportunities, and resources. Equity, on the other hand, provides people with resources that fit their unique needs and circumstances.

Equity entails the assurance of fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of specific groups, most prominently communities of color. The principle of equity acknowledges that there are historical and contemporary systems that maintain inequities based on race that affect individuals, families, neighborhoods, and entire communities. Racial, ethnic, and marginalized groups of people continue to face discrimination, negative bias, and risk of personal harm. A commitment to policies and practices that promote diversity, inclusion, and equity is imperative for the vitality of democracy and the strength of our society.

## WHAT IS EDUCATIONAL EQUITY?

Education plays a major role in determining how you spend your adult life – a higher level of education means higher earnings, better health, and a longer life. At the same time,

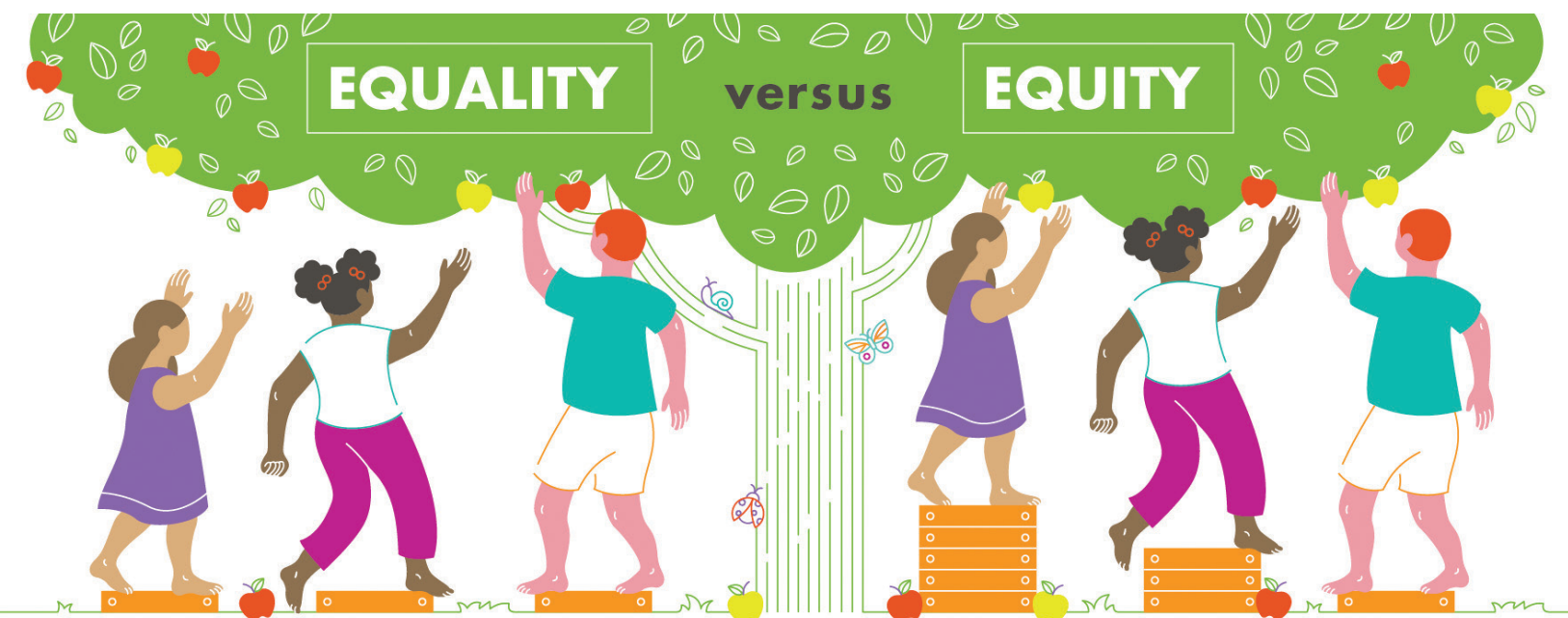
the long-term social and financial costs of an inadequate education are high. People who are denied the educational resources needed to fully participate in our society – socially, economically, and politically – generally experience poorer health, lower incomes, and pervasive disenfranchisement.

The extent and persistence of educational disparities rooted in race and class in our community cannot be understood as an accumulation of distinct “failures” by thousands of individual children. Persistent disparities among groups of children are the product of longstanding inequities. They are the mark of systemic failure.

Equity in education requires putting systems in place to ensure that every child has an equal chance for success. It requires understanding the unique challenges and barriers faced by students, individually and/or as members of a group, and providing additional resources to enable them to succeed.

While equality means treating every student the same, equity means making sure every student has the support they need to be successful. Schools that prioritize equity over equality are more attuned to their students’ needs and provide the resources needed to remove barriers to achievement.

A sign that educational equity has been achieved is when differences in student performance cannot be identified on the basis of race. A fair and inclusive educational system ensures that all students have what they need to succeed in the classroom and beyond. It is a powerful means for creating a more just and equitable society.





# Support for High Quality Pre-K

Investing in high-quality Pre-K is a means of advancing social and racial equity in our educational system and enhancing the well-being, academic achievement, and success of our increasingly diverse community. Studies have shown that while all children benefit from high-quality Pre-K, it is especially beneficial for children from communities of color and families with low incomes.

An extensive body of scientific research clearly demonstrates that high-quality early childhood programs increase children's prospects for lifelong success. Public investments in these programs generate savings of tax dollars and increases in productivity that benefit the economy. These proven results have led states and municipalities across the country to make significant investments in early childhood programs, particularly in high-quality Pre-K.

- The Duke University study of North Carolina's More at Four (now called the North Carolina Pre-K Program) and Smart Start programs found **a six-month gain in reading proficiency by the end of fifth grade. The incidence of special education placements was cut by 48 percent, and grade retention during elementary school was lowered by 29 percent.**

Further research has found that the benefits last at least through the end of eighth grade. Positive impacts were found for every group of children studied, including economically disadvantaged as well as advantaged children; African American, Hispanic, and white non-Hispanic children; and children whose mothers are well-educated as well as those whose mothers are less well-educated.

(See: <https://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/local/education/article115728038.html>)

- The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) at Rutgers University found that a **high-quality universal Pre-K program would significantly reduce achievement gaps at kindergarten entry**. Based on the average effect that two largescale, highly effective programs in different parts of the country had on participating children's achievement scores, it is estimated that high-quality universal Pre-K would **reduce the achievement gap at kindergarten entry in math by 45 percent for African American children and by 78 percent for Hispanic children, while essentially closing the entire gap in reading for both groups.**

(See: <http://nieer.org/policy-issue/special-report-access-to-high-quality-early-education-and-racial-equity>)

- In the mid-sixties the Perry Preschool Project in Ypsilanti (MI) identified a sample of 123 low-income African-American children who were assessed to be at high risk of school failure and randomly assigned 58 of them to a program group that received a high-quality preschool program at ages 3 and 4; and 65 to another group that received no preschool program. The ongoing longitudinal study found that at age 40, the participants who experienced the preschool program had fewer teenage pregnancies, were more likely to have graduated from high school, were more likely to hold a job and have higher earnings, committed fewer crimes, and had higher rates of homeownership. The return on investment has been calculated at \$12.90 per dollar spent.

(See <https://highscope.org/perry-preschool-project/>)

*An annotated bibliography of additional research studies of high-quality Pre-K programs is provided in the Appendix.*

# Forsyth County Educational Equity Report Card

Communities need to provide universal access to high-quality Pre-K programs that build on each child's individual and family strengths, cultural background, language, abilities, and experiences.

## Percentage of children entering kindergarten in the WS/FCS likely to do well in reading in later grades

	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
<b>All Students</b>	54%	52%	49%
<b>African American</b>	56%	54%	47%
<b>Hispanic Latino</b>	29%	29%	28%
<b>White, Non-Hispanic</b>	67%	64%	61%

Source: Winston-Salem / Forsyth County Schools

Forsyth County's youngest children start their educational journey at dramatically different levels of readiness, marked by significant, long-standing racial/ethnic disparities.

## Percentage of children in the WS/FCS reading at grade level at the end of third grade

	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
<b>All Students</b>	53%	52%	52%
<b>African American</b>	38%	38%	37%
<b>Hispanic Latino</b>	33%	34%	35%
<b>White, Non-Hispanic</b>	77%	74%	74%

Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

Early "reading readiness" scores are highly predictive of students' reading proficiency at the end of third grade and have remained largely unchanged over the past decade.

## The impact of these inequities can last a lifetime.

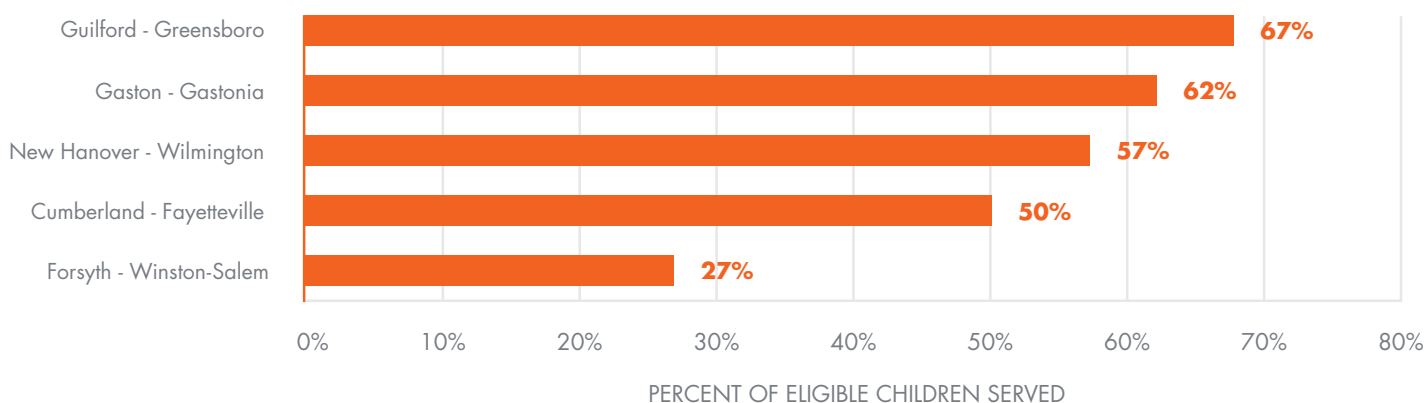
A 2017 Harvard University study of economic mobility found that Forsyth County ranked 2,881 out of 2,885 counties, only ahead of four Native American reservations.

# NC Pre-K Enrollment by County

This state-funded Pre-K program, established as “More at Four” in 2000, is designed to promote social and racial equity by providing children from families with low incomes with a high-quality Pre-K education. In 2019-20 **Forsyth County enrolled only 27% of the total number of children that were eligible for the program. Statewide, an average of 47% of eligible children are enrolled in NC Pre-K.** Guilford County enrolls 67% of eligible children in its NC Pre-K program. Below is a comparison of enrollment rates in Forsyth and four other counties.

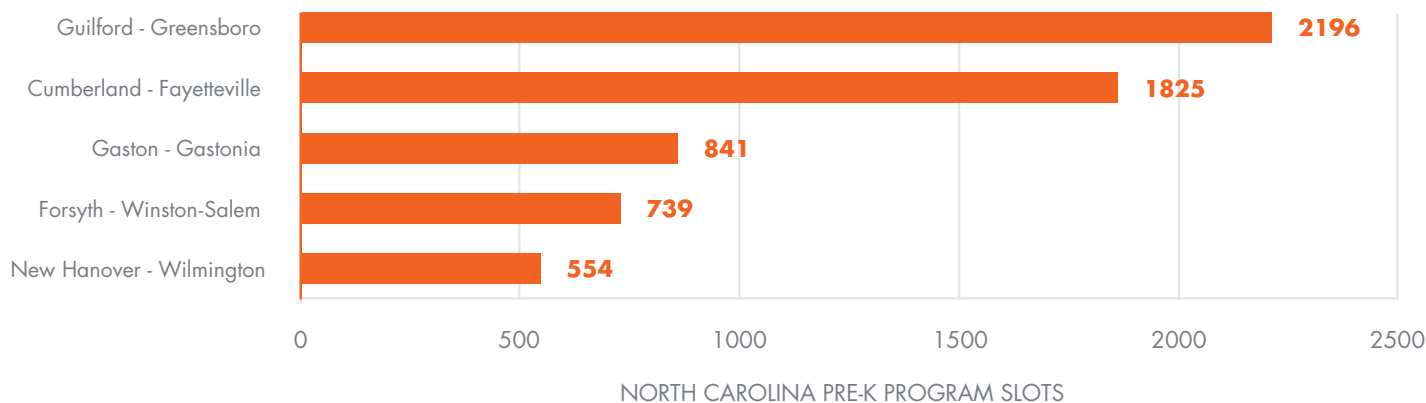
Forsyth County ranks near the bottom of North Carolina counties in enrolling eligible children in the North Carolina Pre-K Program (NC Pre-K).

## Percentage of Eligible Children Enrolled in NC Pre-K Program (2019-20)



In 2019-20, 739 four-year-olds were enrolled in the NC Pre-K Program in Forsyth County. If Forsyth were to match the Guilford County enrollment rate, **an additional 1,116 low- to moderate-income children could be attending the NC Pre-K program.** The table below compares NC Pre-K enrollment in Forsyth County and four other counties in 2019-20.

## Number of Children Enrolled in NC Pre-K Program (2019-20)



# Childcare Reimbursement Rates and Implications

Forsyth County's low NC Pre-K enrollment numbers underscore a broader predicament that Forsyth County must deal with: receiving an inequitable share of the resources needed for all its children to be ready to succeed in school and for the county to prosper in the future.

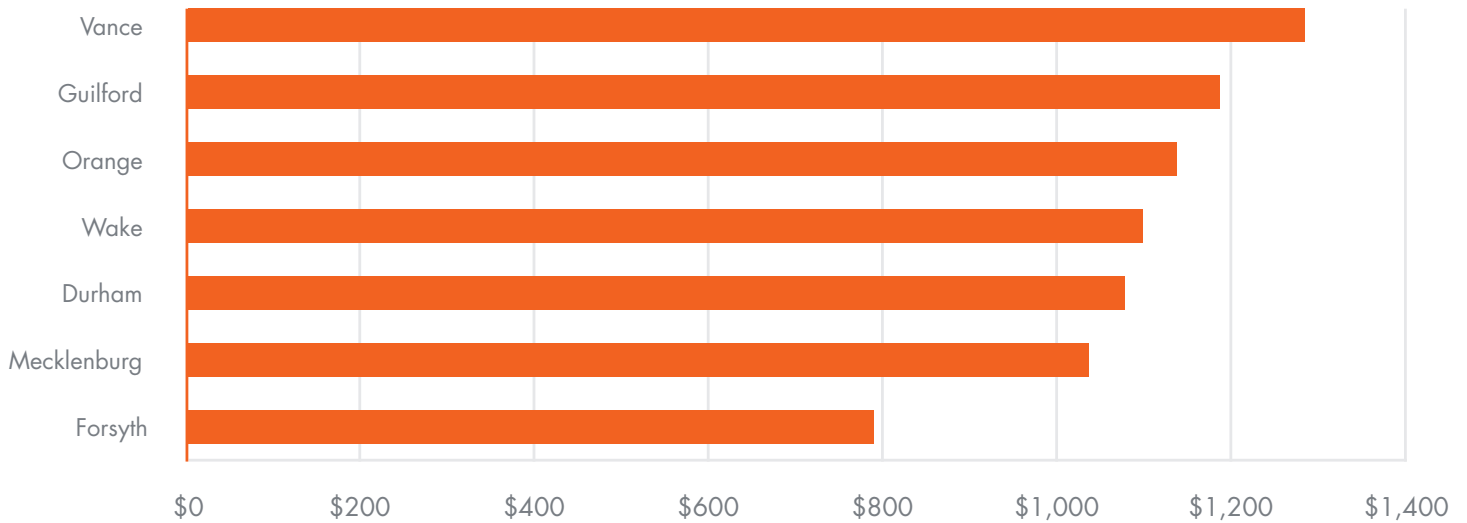
The COVID-19 pandemic has made even more clear that the childcare industry is an essential component of the economy, providing jobs for teachers and support for working families. By the end of April 2020, 40% of childcare centers in North Carolina had shut down. It became clear that any reopening of the economy was dependent on the availability of childcare. At the same time COVID-19 revealed that a viable childcare industry requires

a solid financial foundation. For childcare providers in North Carolina that foundation is set by the market rate established by the Division of Child Development and Early Education. Forsyth County has market rates for childcare programs that are significantly below the rates enjoyed by other urban counties. The Market Rate graph (to the right) provides a comparison of the monthly reimbursement rate (per child) for a five-star rated classroom for three- to five-year-olds. Note that the rate for Guilford County, at \$1,187 per child per month, is 50% higher than Forsyth County's \$790 rate. It's only four miles from Kernersville to Colfax, but if you're a childcare provider it's a difference of \$397 per child per month, which translates to a \$71,460 annual difference for a classroom of 18 four-year-olds.





### Market Rate — Five Star Centers, 3- to 5-yr-olds



**Lower market rates for childcare providers also has translated to a shrinking landscape of childcare resources for families.**

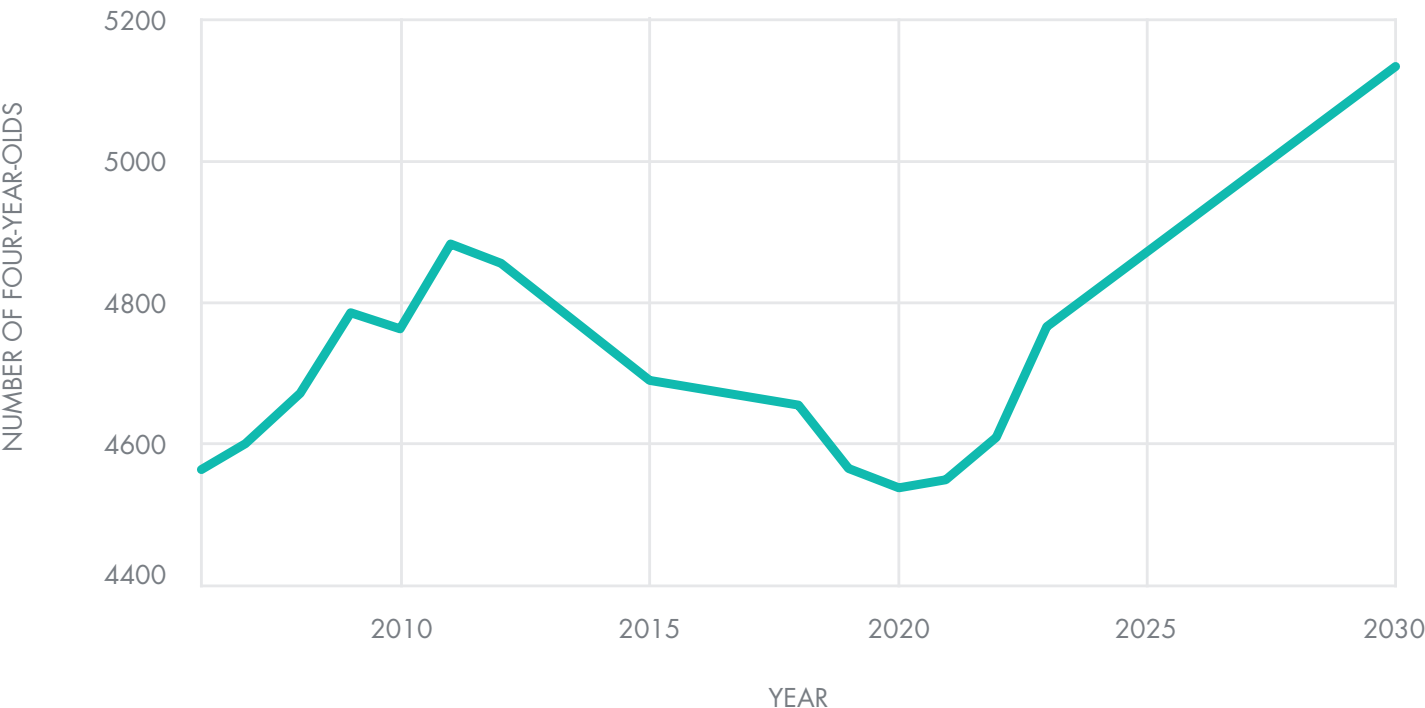
- According to the Child Care Resource Center, the number of licensed childcare facilities in Forsyth County, including Pre-K has declined from 300 to 163 in 10 years.
- Families who reported the highest levels of dissatisfaction with their current Pre-K situation are those in the middle-income bracket (above \$33,000 but less than \$75,000) who may make too much to qualify for publicly-funded programs yet can't afford the limited options for quality, private childcare.



# Shifting Demographics in Forsyth County

**Forsyth County’s population of four-year-olds is rising and becoming more diverse.** Future demographic trends underscore the need to act now to expand high-quality Pre-K. The number of four-year-old children in Forsyth County is now firmly children of color majority, (29% African American, 24% Hispanic/Latino, 44% White/Non-Hispanic, and 3% Other) and is expected to increase significantly over the next decade.

Number of Four-Year-Old Children in Forsyth County\*



Failure to act now to increase the availability of high-quality Pre-K in Forsyth County risks worsening the disparities that hold back our children and jeopardizes the future vitality of our community.

**Expanding access to publicly funded, high-quality Pre-K has been shown to be a powerful tool for achieving racial equity in education and increasing economic mobility for low-income children.**

*\*Source: North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management*

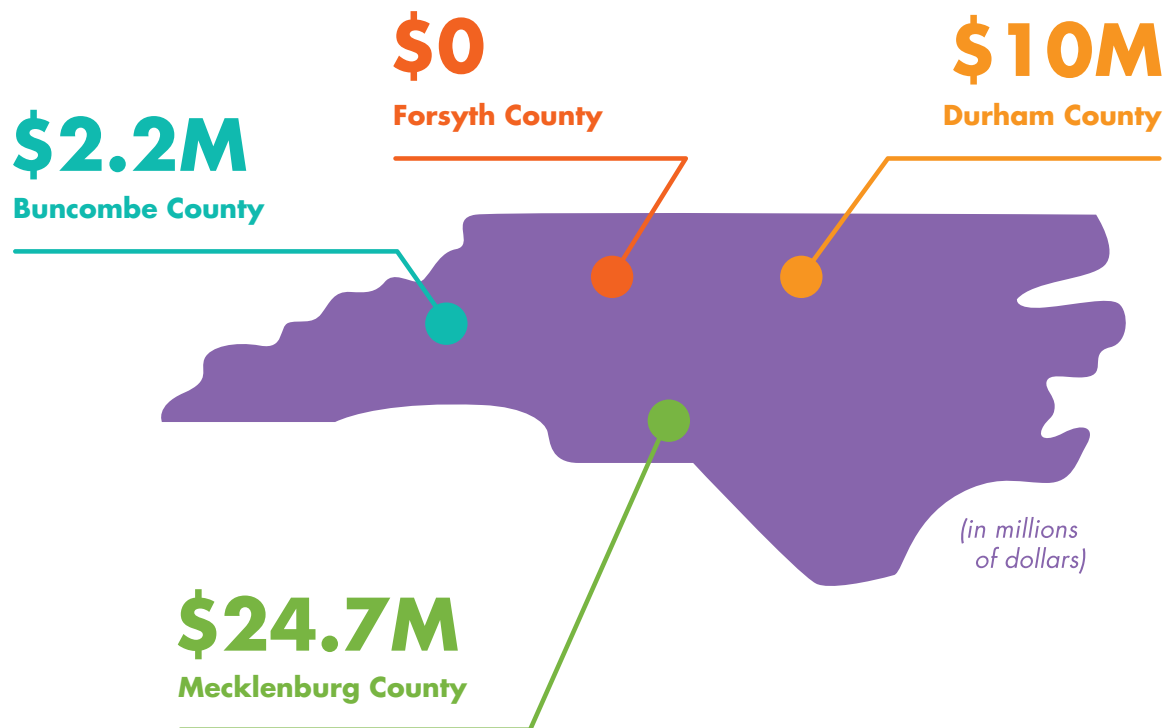
# The Absence of Local Funding

As states, counties, and cities across the United States re-assess how they fund essential community services, **investing in early childhood education, especially in high-quality Pre-K, is one of the best means for addressing social and racial disparities both in the near and long term.** Urban counties across North Carolina are allocating local tax dollars to improve the quality and increase the number of their Pre-K programs. However, **Forsyth County has yet to provide ANY local public funds to improve and expand its Pre-K system.**

It is past time for Forsyth County to seriously confront long-standing inequities in the education of its children. **Educational disparities can be addressed most**

**effectively where the greatest impact can be achieved – in early childhood.** Disparities in reading proficiency and educational success lead to the wide disparities in employment, income, health, homeownership, incarceration, and life expectancy that currently afflict our community. The cost in terms of lost potential is incalculable. However, the return on investment has been calculated. Numerous studies such as those cited earlier by Duke University and NIEER have repeatedly demonstrated that high-quality Pre-K programs increase school readiness, close reading proficiency gaps, reduce special education costs, increase high school graduation and postsecondary education rates, and provide a return of investment of up to \$13 for every dollar invested.

## Pre-K Expansion Investments by County Government







## A Call to Action

**We call upon our civic leaders and elected officials to establish a Community Early Childhood Education Task Force to develop both a near-term and long-term plan for increasing the availability of high-quality Pre-K programs in Forsyth County with the overarching goal of creating a universal, high-quality Pre-K system.**

The Task Force would be established by a joint resolution of the Forsyth County Board of Commissioners, the Winston-Salem City Council, and the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools Board of Education with support from The Pre-K Priority. A sample resolution is provided in Appendix A.

The Pre-K Priority is prepared to provide the Task Force with the research findings, local feasibility and public perception studies, alternative program models, and evidence-based recommendations that it has worked diligently over the last 6 years to collect and prepare. The work of The Pre-K Priority provides the framework for developing a practicable, equity-based plan for implementing a system of high-quality Pre-K programs in Forsyth County. With that in hand, our civic leaders and elected officials will have the opportunity to exercise the political will to address Forsyth County's low share of NC Pre-K funding and to secure the financial resources required to establish an expanded, high-quality Pre-K system in Forsyth County and foster a more just, equitable, and prosperous community.



*NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT Resolved that the Forsyth County Board of County Commissioners, the Winston-Salem City Council, and the Winston-Salem Forsyth County Schools Board of Education do hereby commission a Community Early Childhood Education Task Force; and*

*BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the three elected bodies charge the Community Early Childhood Education Task Force to lead our community in crafting an equity-based funding and implementation plan for ensuring that all of Forsyth County's low-income low- and moderate-income children have access to high-quality preschools; and*

*BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Task Force plan will include:*

- a) Forsyth County's current capacity for providing high-quality Pre-K (identifying what we have and what we need)*
- b) Methods other communities have used to create broader preschool participation*
- c) Financial models for supporting universal Pre-K*
- d) Ways of cooperating with private or community-based providers of high-quality Pre-K*
- e) Evidence-based practices of high-quality Pre-K*
- f) Capacity for increasing professional development opportunities for Pre-K teachers*
- g) Recommendations for universal Pre-K in Forsyth County informed by research*
- h) Timeline for implementation*

*BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that approximately fifteen Task Force members will be identified by and include the Executive Director of Smart Start of Forsyth County, the Executive Director of the Child Care Resource Center, and the President and CEO of Family Services by January 31, 2021. Membership on the Task Force will represent all important stakeholder groups and will reflect the demographic makeup of our community.*

The foundation for the work of the Community Early Childhood Education Task Force has been laid over the past six years through the work of the more than 60 individuals and 20 organizations that are members of The Pre-K Priority. They have reviewed the research literature and identified evidence-based standards and practices. Surveys of parents, providers, educators, and the general public have been conducted that reveal wide-spread support for increasing investments in early childhood education. A comprehensive study by Forsyth Futures of the feasibility of establishing a universal Pre-K system in Forsyth County has been completed. Detailed, wide-ranging recommendations that address the multiple components of a high-quality universal Pre-K system have been published. In essence, the work identified in the resolution in items a, b, c, d, e, f, and g has largely been accomplished.

All of the above information would be available to the Community Early Childhood Education Task Force. The Task Force is charged with shaping all the findings and recommendations into a practicable and achievable plan for expanding high-quality Pre-K programs in Forsyth County.

### **The Life-Cycle Benefits of an Influential Early Childhood Program**

*Center for the Economics of Human Development at the University of Chicago*

García, J. L., Heckman, J. J., Leaf, D. E. & Prados, M. J. (2016)

<https://www.nber.org/papers/w22993.pdf>

[https://heckmanequation.org/assets/2017/01/F\\_Heckman\\_CBAOnePager\\_120516.pdf](https://heckmanequation.org/assets/2017/01/F_Heckman_CBAOnePager_120516.pdf)

A longitudinal study of the economic benefits of high-quality birth-to-five programs found these programs can deliver a 13% per year return on investment for disadvantaged children. The returns are realized through improved outcomes in health, education, social behaviors, and employment. Nobel Prize winning economist James Heckman estimates that for every \$1 spent on high-quality preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds, communities save \$7 in long-term costs for things like educational remediation, social supports, or criminal justice.

### **Why Business Should Support Early Childhood Education**

*U.S. Chamber of Commerce Institute for a Competitive Workforce (2010)*

[https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/sites/default/files/publication/edu/ICW\\_EarlyChildhoodReport\\_2010.pdf](https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/sites/default/files/publication/edu/ICW_EarlyChildhoodReport_2010.pdf)

An annual, inflation-adjusted rate of return of 16% has been determined for high-quality Pre-K for disadvantaged three- and four-year olds. Previous senior vice president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, Arthur J. Rolnik and associate economist Robert Grunewald cited these returns based on long-term educational, social, and economic benefits, including increased earnings and tax revenues and decreased use of welfare and other social services, resulting in lower expenses for states and communities.

### **Investing Early: Taking Stock of Outcomes and Economic Returns from Early Childhood Programs**

*RAND Corporation*

Cannon, J. S., Kilburn, M. R., Karoly, L. A., Mattox, T., Muchow, A. N., Buenaventura, M. (2017)

[https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1900/RR1993/RAND\\_RR1993.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1900/RR1993/RAND_RR1993.pdf)

Based on the results of a wide-ranging cost benefit analysis of early childhood programs, returns per child are likely to be higher for more economically disadvantaged groups, but returns are positive on average for children across the income spectrum. Additionally, this study found that improved child outcomes are the result of the enhanced child development inputs; inputs either received directly through the program or achieved by promoting parenting capacity.

### **Puzzling It Out: The Current State of Scientific Knowledge on Pre-Kindergarten Effects, A Consensus Statement**

*Brookings Institution & Duke University Center for Child and Family Policy*

Phillips, D. A., Lipsey, M. W., Dodge, K. A., Haskins, R., Bassok, D., Burchinal, M. R., Duncan, G. J., Dynarski, M., Magnuson, K. A., & Weiland, C. (2017)

[https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/duke\\_prekstudy\\_final\\_4-4-17\\_hires.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/duke_prekstudy_final_4-4-17_hires.pdf)

Evidence shows that children attending a diverse array of state and school district Pre-K programs are more ready for school at the end of their Pre-K year than children who do not attend a Pre-K program. Improvements in academic areas such as literacy and numeracy are most common.

### **Impacts of Early Childhood Education on Medium- and Long-Term Educational Outcomes**

*National Forum on Early Childhood Policy and Programs, Harvard University*

McCoy, D. H., Yoshikawa, H., Zio-Guest, K. M., Duncan, G. J., Schindler, H. S., Magnuson, K., Yang, R., Koepp, A., & Shanokoff, J. P. (2017)

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6107077/pdf/nihms984699.pdf>

By lessening or preventing achievement gaps earlier in life, children and schools benefit from Pre-K; benefits include kindergarten ready children that perform better through their post-secondary school years, have higher achievement test scores, repeat grades less often, require less special education and graduate from high school at higher rates with the likelihood of attending college.

### **How Much Can High-Quality UPK Reduce Achievement Gaps**

*Center for American Progress & National Institute of Early Education Research*

Friedman-Krauss, A., Barnett, W.S., & Nores, M. April 2016

<https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/01120042/IntroNIEER-AchievementGaps-report.pdf#:~:text=ing%20children%E2%80%99s%20achievement%20scores%2C%20it%20is%20estimated%20that,78%20percent%20for%20Hispanic%20children%2C%20while%20essentially%20closing>

Analysis using two nationally representative data sets and evaluations of universal high-quality pre-kindergarten programs in different parts of the county demonstrate that achievement gaps by race, ethnicity, and income can be reduced at the entry to Kindergarten with an emphasis on equity and accessibility.

### **Impact of North Carolina's Early Childhood Programs and Policies on Educational Outcomes in Elementary School**

*Duke University Center for Child and Family Policy*

Dodge, K. A., Bai, Y., Ladd, H. F., & Muschkin, C. G. (2017)

<https://muser.duke.edu/sites/default/files/publications/2019-08/Dodge%20et%20al%202017.pdf>

North Carolina's public Pre-K Program has resulted in students with higher achievement and standardized test scores through fifth grade in both reading and math, fewer children requiring special education placement, and lower rates of grade retention in grades 3, 4 and 5.

### **Evaluation of North Carolina's Smart Start and NC Pre-K Programs: Follow Up Through 8th Grade**

(2018)

<https://duke.app.box.com/s/pw3zv27a2jkmfas2j183yg4ekamxzl8y>

### **The Effects of Tulsa's CAP Head Start Program on Middle School Academic Outcomes and Progress**

*Georgetown University*

Phillips, D., Gormley, W., & Anderson, S. (2016)

[https://captulsa.org/uploaded\\_assets/pdf/Phillips-Gormley-Anderson-2016.pdf](https://captulsa.org/uploaded_assets/pdf/Phillips-Gormley-Anderson-2016.pdf)

The evaluation of the Tulsa (OK) universal Pre-K program finds that all children were less likely to be retained in elementary and middle grades. This result is especially important because grade retention is closely associated with weak academic performance, dropping out of school, higher crime rates, and lower earnings later in life.

**THE PRE-K PRIORITY** is a coalition of community organizations convened by Family Services and supported by the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust.

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Officer at **[mspeas@familyservicesforsyth.org](mailto:mspeas@familyservicesforsyth.org)**

**[FamilyServicesForsyth.org](http://FamilyServicesForsyth.org)** | [facebook.com/FamilyServices](https://facebook.com/FamilyServices)  
**[PreKPriority.org](http://PreKPriority.org)** | [facebook.com/PreKPriority](https://facebook.com/PreKPriority)

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