



The North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc.

House Select Committee on Early Childhood Education Improvement

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What is Smart Start?

Smart Start inspires and connects people to make immediate and lasting change in the health and well-being of North Carolina's young children. It is a network of nonprofit local partnerships led by a state-level organization (NCPC) working together.

As a public/private partnership, Smart Start is a cutting edge system that capitalizes on limited government, innovation, and local control, providing resources for parents and economic results for all North Carolinians.



NCPC and Local Partnerships work together to:

- Educate North Carolinians that experiences early in life have a lasting impact on later learning.
- Establish innovative, high-performing programs and services that measurably increase young children's health, development, and school readiness.
- Build strong relationships and shared goals between people, programs, and communities to maximize effectiveness.
- Increase investments in early childhood education, health, and family support that produce the highest return on the dollar.
- Produce and use data to identify needs and trends, demonstrate results, and promote continuous quality improvement.

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Overview of Presentation

Since Smart Start's creation in 1993, it has been guided consistently by the same mission. What has changed over time is the context in which Smart Start operates and the problems it seeks to address.

Today, we will review Smart Start's history, highlight challenges that Smart Start has helped the state meet, explain the manner in which Smart Start operates today, and discuss current state challenges that Smart Start is addressing.

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Genesis of Smart Start

In 1990, North Carolina had:

- 557,511 children birth to five,
- 19% of families with children under six lived in poverty, and
- 67% of mothers in the workforce.

Children and families needed:

- Safe child care, and
- Higher quality care that provided early education experiences.

Smart Start was created in this context to address these problems.

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Genesis of Smart Start

Smart Start was based on research that experiences early in life can have a lasting impact on later learning.

Today, neuroscientists are able to show that early experiences actually shape the architecture of the brain and strongly affect whether a child grows up to be a healthy, productive member of society.

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Genesis of Smart Start

The General Assembly created Smart Start and The North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc. (NCPC) on July 9, 1993.

Policymakers established Smart Start as a public/private partnership. As such, it uses government dollars as a catalyst to leverage local ideas and resources.

Smart Start staff are employees of independent nonprofit organizations, not state employees.

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Genesis of Smart Start

The legislation called for 12 pioneer Smart Start local partnerships. Counties were selected following an in-depth application process.

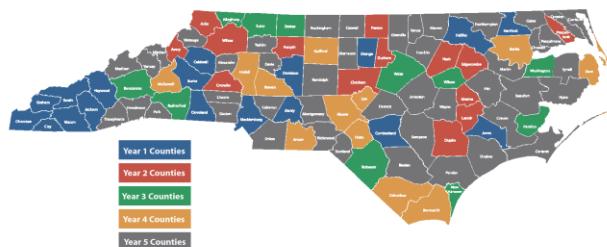
NCPC was originally charged with overseeing the development and implementation of the pioneer partnerships and developing the state's early childhood strategic plan.

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Growth of Smart Start

The success of the pioneer partnerships led to the five-year expansion of Smart Start. In 1998, Smart Start was available statewide.



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Smart Start: The Early Years

What did Smart Start do in the early years?

Smart Start brought together nonprofit organizations, foundations, state agencies, and others to solve the problems of the day.

Together, NCPC and Local Partnerships with their state and local partners made significant progress in addressing early childhood challenges the state was facing.

The following examples demonstrate some of Smart Start's early successes.

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Solving Problems: Immunization

Challenge: In the 1990s, the number of children receiving immunizations was dropping.

State Level: Multiple state agencies worked with Smart Start to understand the problem. They saw a need to partner with people in local communities who interacted with young children.

Local Level: Smart Start Partnerships were able to reach at-risk families and connect them with the Division of Public Health, which provided the vaccines and administered the shots.

Result: NC has one of the highest immunization rates in the nation.



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Solving Problems: School Readiness

Challenge: Many children, particularly those who had not been in formal child care, were not prepared for kindergarten.

State Level: NCPC and state leaders worked together to develop the More at Four model, which was then funded by the General Assembly.

Local Level: Smart Start Partnerships recruit eligible children and help private child care programs upgrade their classrooms so that they may participate. Some administer the program.

Result: Children participating in More at Four and Smart Start are better prepared for school.



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Solving Problems: Child Care Quality

Challenge: Children were not safe in child care or benefiting from educational experiences.

State Level: The Division of Child Development created the voluntary 5-star rating system. Smart Start incorporated the measure into its statewide accountability system.

Local Level: Partnerships helped private child care providers better educate their teachers and provide ongoing professional development.

Result: The public strongly supported the star rating system, and child care providers embraced the opportunity to increase quality.

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Smart Start Today

Today, Smart Start continues to inspire and connect people to make immediate and lasting change in the health and well-being of North Carolina's young children.

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Smart Start Today

Today, North Carolina faces an even greater challenge of child poverty. There are more children birth to five; more of those children are living in poverty.

More Children

In 1990, there were 557,511 children birth to five. Today, there are 782,053—a **40% increase**.

More Children Living in Poverty

Since 1990, there has been an **85% increase in the number of children living in poverty**.

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Smart Start Today

Today, NCPC ensures that Smart Start fully meets all legislatively mandated requirements and operates to the highest standards of effectiveness, accountability, efficiency and integrity. NCPC is dedicated to excellence and innovation in Smart Start through public/private partnership and leadership in best practices and evidence-based programming.

NCPC supports the success of the whole Smart Start system.

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Smart Start Today

NCPC provides leadership and support to local partnerships in the areas of:

- Program innovation,
- Outcomes and accountability,
- Data and evaluation,
- Fiscal and grants management, and
- Fundraising.

NCPC convenes and collaborates with state partners to ensure effective and efficient services for young children across the state.

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Smart Start Today

During the past ten years, NCPC and Smart Start local partnerships have been audited more than 450 times by State auditors and/or independent auditors hired by the State.

- NCPC has had no audit findings for the past nine years.
- In the past two years, all partnerships were audited, and had no findings.

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Smart Start Today

Today, independent, nonprofit organizations work in all 100 North Carolina counties through NCPC and 77 Local Partnerships.



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Smart Start Today

What does Smart Start do today?

- Educate North Carolinians that experiences early in life have a lasting impact on later learning.
- Establish innovative, high-performing programs and services that measurably increase young children's health, development, and school readiness.
- Build strong relationships and shared goals between people, programs, and communities to maximize effectiveness.
- Increase investments in early childhood education, health, and family support that produce the highest return on the dollar.
- Produce and use data to identify needs and trends, demonstrate results, and promote continuous quality improvement.

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Smart Start: Educate

Educate North Carolinians that experiences early in life have a lasting impact on later learning.

At the local level, Local Partnerships:

- Provide families, child care professionals, and communities with information about healthy child development and the benefits of strong families, high-quality early education, and good physical and mental health.

At the state level, NCPC:

- Educates and engages the public on the importance of the early years in a child's later success in school and life. NCPC raised private grant funds to implement the Smart Investing initiative, which engaged more than 800 diverse North Carolinians, representing every county in the state in reviewing data and making tough decisions to identify the state's priorities for children.

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Smart Start: Innovate

Establish innovative, high-performing programs and services that measurably increase young children's health, development, and school readiness.

At the local level, Local Partnerships:

- Help child care programs achieve higher stars on NC's rated license through onsite technical assistance, training, and support for child care professionals to obtain higher education.
- Work with doctor's offices to increase the number of children who receive the right developmental screenings, referrals and follow-up to detect and treat developmental delays early.
- Give parents the tools they need to raise healthy, successful children by providing education and resources through programs that increase parents' knowledge of early childhood development and positive parenting practices.

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Smart Start: Innovate

Establish innovative, high-performing programs and services that measurably increase young children’s health, development, and school readiness.

At the state level, NCPK:

- Promotes evidence-based programs with proven outcomes. NCPK works with state partners in health, child development, and family support to launch programs through local partnerships across the state—such as the Assuring Better Child Health and Development (ABCD), which provides assistance to physicians to ensure that all children receive developmental screening and so that primary care providers are able to refer children with developmental concerns to the appropriate services. Today, North Carolina has the highest rate of developmental screenings in the nation.



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Smart Start: Build Relationships

Build strong relationships and shared goals between people, programs, and communities to maximize effectiveness.

At the local level, Local Partnerships:

- Help recruit and enroll children, recruit and improve the quality of NCPK classrooms, and administer NCPK (45 LPs). They partner with NCPK providers (private child care, Head Start, and public schools) to help eligible four-year-olds access NCPK.

At the state level, NCPK:

- Collaborate with state literacy organizations, local partnerships, private child care programs, and pediatricians to promote early literacy across the state through programs like Raising a Reader and Reach Out and Read®. Both programs provide books to parents to read with their children and information on how to help children develop language and literacy skills.



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Smart Start: Increase Investments

Increase investments in early childhood education, health, and family support that produce the highest return on the dollar.

At the local level, Local Partnerships:

- Raise millions of dollars in addition to Smart Start funds to help meet the growing need for high-quality early education, health, and family support services in their communities.

At the state level, NCPC:

- Raises funds to support innovative solutions to some of NC's greatest challenges for children birth to five and their families. NCPC was awarded a \$5 million dollar, five-year grant by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation to build organizational capacity to improve outcomes, and was a key member of the Governor's team that put together NC's winning Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge application.



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Smart Start: Data Driven

Produce and use data to identify needs and trends, demonstrate results, and promote continuous quality improvement.

At the local level, Local Partnerships:

- Collect, analyze, and report on every program they deliver or fund to ensure accountability, identify and address unmet needs, and make improvements.

At the state level, NCPC:

- Uses independent data sources to determine how young children are faring in key indicators of healthy development. These population-level indicators hold local partnerships accountable for better outcomes for young children in every county.



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Smart Start: Today

Smart Start continues to bring together nonprofit organizations, foundations, state agencies, and others to solve the problems of the day.

The following examples demonstrate some of Smart Start's current work.

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Solving Problems: Child Obesity

Challenge: NC has fifth highest rate of childhood obesity in the country.

State Level: The Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation awarded \$3 million to NCPC to create *Shape NC*, a groundbreaking initiative that is tackling the childhood obesity epidemic by focusing on young children in child care and community settings.

Local Level: Partnerships are working with local child care programs to ensure that children are served nutritious foods, engage in physical activity, and have teachers modeling healthy behaviors.

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Solving Problems: Child Abuse

Challenge: More effective strategies needed to prevent child abuse and neglect.

State Level: NCPC joins private foundations, nonprofit organizations, and public agencies to explore and expand evidence-based and evidence-informed practice to prevent child abuse.

Local Level: Smart Start Partnerships apply for private and public funding to implement family support evidenced-based projects.

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Solving Problems: Child Care Quality

Challenge: All children in child care should benefit from high quality care and education.

State Level: NCPC works with the Division of Child Development and Early Education and the Department of Public Instruction to improve the quality of early education workforce and private, nonprofit, and church child care programs.

Local Level: Smart Start Partnerships provide child care providers with tailored on-site technical assistance and professional development to improve and maintain their star-rating.

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Smart Start Accomplishments

NCPC establishes measurable, statewide goals for increasing the health, well-being and development of North Carolina's children birth to five. Local Partnerships then take responsibility for making decisions about how best to achieve those goals based on the needs and resources in their local communities.

Since 1996 there have been 37 independently conducted evaluations of Smart Start, all with positive results.

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Smart Start Accomplishments

More children attend high quality care. In FY 2010-11:

- 67% of all children in early care and education attend 4- and 5-star programs as compared to 33% in 2001.
- 78% of children whose families received subsidy attend 4- and 5-star centers (compared to 30% in 2001).
- Today, 10% of all children in early child care and education attend 1- and 2-star centers (compared to 46% in 2001).

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Smart Start Accomplishments

More families have the tools they need to raise healthy, successful children. In FY 2010-11:

- 72% of parents read to their child/children at least four days a week after participating in the Raising a Reading program, compared to 63% before the program.
- Parents who described their children as having above normal challenging behaviors decreased from 36% to 14% after participation in The Incredible Years program.

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Smart Start Accomplishments

More children with disabilities are identified at a younger age and are referred to early intervention services. In FY 2010-11:

- 94% of children whose medical offices participated in the Assuring Better Child Health and Development (ABCD) program received recommended developmental screenings at their most recent well-child visit, compared to 85% before ABCD.

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Smart Start Accomplishments

More children are benefiting from better nutrition and physical activity. In FY 2010-11:

- 96% of child care programs participating in the evidence-based Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care (NAP SACC) program improved physical activity and nutritional practices.

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Smart Start Accomplishments

A 2011 Duke University study found children had higher third grade reading and math scores and fewer special education placements in counties that received more funding for Smart Start when those children were younger.

The researchers concluded that **investments in Smart Start generate broad education benefits.**

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Why Does it Matter?

The Education Continuum: The first 2,000 days are critical.

“There are only 2,000 days between the newborn baby and when that child will show up in kindergarten. It is urgent that we use the best scientific info to make sure we support all our children so they can succeed in school. Our children can’t wait.”

*Dr. Andrew Meltzoff, co-director
University of Washington Institute for Learning and Brain Sciences*

