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Smart Start Launches Statewide Initiatives to Support Children, Families Affected by COVID-19 Pandemic

\$5 Million in CARES Act Funds Allocated by NCDHHS to Impact N.C. Families

Raleigh, NC – The North Carolina Partnership for Children and the statewide Smart Start network have launched a series of initiatives to support families and children during the COVID-19 pandemic, leveraging \$5 million in federal CARES Act funds allocated by the General Assembly and the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS). Smart Start is providing training for parents and early childhood professionals to address ongoing stress, collaborating with family child care providers to adjust their operations and maintain access to care for families, and distributing devices and broadband technology to increase virtual access for families and early childhood professionals.

“During this crisis, I’m proud that Smart Start has worked quickly through our network of local partnerships to leverage these funds to meet the needs of families and children across the state,” said Amy Cabbage, president of the North Carolina Partnership for Children, which oversees the Smart Start network. “We are grateful that our state’s policymakers recognized the importance of support for child care, children and families and invested in these needs.”

The General Assembly allocated \$20 million in federal COVID-19 relief funds to support early childhood initiatives, and NCDHHS allocated \$5 million of this to Smart Start for initiatives focused on children and families.

One of the Smart Start initiatives addresses the ongoing stress faced by young children and families. [Resources for Resilience](#) includes self-awareness and self-regulation training for parents and coaching for early childhood professionals. The program trains adults on what happens to children affected by stress, provides coaching to support resiliency tools and includes a schedule of drop-in Listening Circles for parents and educators to discuss the strategies learned.

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Smart Start is also supporting family child care directors in order to ensure critical access to child care in communities throughout the state. In September, there were more than 1,300 family child care homes in North Carolina, serving almost 8,700 children. Smart Start is helping these providers by offering access to [Wonderschool](#), a business automation platform for family child care and small centers. Wonderschool delivers digital tools and training to help providers adjust to business challenges caused by the pandemic and to improve communication with parents.

Smart Start is supporting these initiatives, as well as parenting education and home visiting programs, by providing access to technology and internet for families and early childhood professionals. According to Census data, almost 25% of North Carolina households do not subscribe to any internet services, with a disproportionate impact on low-income, rural and minority families. The increased reliance on virtual tools during the pandemic has deepened this digital divide. Smart Start's goal is to ensure that a lack of internet access doesn't limit access to home visiting programs.

Smart Start's local partnerships chose which of the three initiatives met their communities' needs, and almost all are participating in at least one initiative. Early childhood professionals and families interested in participating in these initiatives should contact their [local partnership](#) for details.

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[Smart Start is a network of 75 nonprofit local partnerships](#) that serve all 100 North Carolina counties. This network is led by The North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc. (NCPC) that ensures fiscal and programmatic accountability and coordinates the statewide network to create better outcomes for children and families. For more information, please visit <http://www.smartstart.org/about-smart-start/>