



Smart Start 2024 Legislative Priorities

Smart Start provides critical infrastructure for NC's early childhood system by ensuring each community has the resources needed for young children, families, and providers to thrive. Smart Start's innovative programs prepare children for kindergarten and equip families for success. Through investment in the early childhood education workforce and partnerships with businesses and the state of NC, Smart Start is addressing the child care crisis and helping to boost the economy.

To continue meeting the needs of NC's young children, their families, those who care for and educate them, and the business community, Smart Start requests the following:

- ✓ Increase funding with an **additional \$10 million** in unrestricted recurring funds to maximize impact.
- ✓ Change \$1.5 million, **nonrecurring** funding for Dolly Parton's Imagination Library (DPIL) in the 2023-2025 fiscal biennium to **recurring** to enhance investments in early literacy.

Increase funding with an additional \$10 million in unrestricted recurring funds.



NC's Investment:

Smart Start's state appropriation has remained at \$157 million since 2022—even as NC passed a \$30 billion state budget for SFY 2023-2024. In fact, Smart Start's current appropriation is only 68% of its SFY 2000-2001 budget – despite greater needs – especially as the early childhood education system continues to recover from the ongoing challenges of COVID-19.



Smart Start's Current Impact:

Quality Early Education & Workforce Development and Compensation

- ✓ 4,100+ child care teachers received compensation support statewide in 2023. Of these, 85% remained in their positions throughout the year.
- ✓ 21,000+ teachers received support with higher education and training statewide in 2023. This contributed to 55% of children enrolled in 1-5 star centers having at least 75% of lead teachers with a college degree.

Family Support and Resource Referrals

- ✓ 29 Smart Start Local Partnerships provided family support programming in community settings to 1,900+ families, thereby enhancing child and parent interactions.
- ✓ 16 Smart Start Local Partnerships implemented family support programs for 1,698 participants, referring parents and guardians to needed resources. Over 67% of participants used at least one referral service.

Advancing Health Activities in Early Care and Education Settings

- ✓ 50% of Smart Start Local Partnerships supported their communities with programs to improve various health outcomes, such as administering early intervention screenings for children.
- ✓ 413 child care facilities received technical assistance, child care health consultation, and other supports, improving knowledge, practices, and policies of nutrition and physical health for providers.



Future Impact:

In SFY 2021-2022, a \$10 million increase provided 12% more funding for family support; 10% more funding for prenatal, newborn, and early health services; and 7% more for early care and education services. **Additional funding will continue this trend.**

Change \$1.5 million, nonrecurring funding for DPIL to recurring funding to enhance investments in early literacy.



NC's Investment:

- ✓ In 2017, Smart Start received \$7 million recurring funds to increase access to DPIL.
- ✓ During the 2023-2025 fiscal biennium, Smart Start received \$1.5 million nonrecurring funds for each state fiscal year of the biennium only.



Smart Start's Current Impact:

- ✓ 50% of North Carolina's children aged 0-5 participate in DPIL, increasing from 8% in 2017.
- ✓ DPIL surveys reveal positive outcomes:
 - Parents who participated in DPIL for any length of time reported an increase in reading to their children daily from 39% before they began receiving books to nearly 62% after participating in DPIL.
 - 47% of families reported receiving books they would have been unable to purchase without DPIL.
 - 86% of families reported receiving books they were unaware existed before access to DPIL.



Future Impact:

An additional \$1.5 million will help Smart Start continue to provide program support, pay for books and postage costs, and decrease waitlist totals for communities. For example:

- ✓ Approximately 300,000 children will continue to receive books monthly with book expenses averaging \$630,000 monthly and \$2.10 per book (\$7,565,000).
- ✓ 68% of Smart Start Local Partnerships need continued funding for program support such as hiring staff and increasing outreach for program expansion to support families by making them aware of the opportunity to help with their child's development. (\$850,000).
- ✓ Additional funding is needed for NCPC to manage and evaluate DPIL (\$85,000).



Smart Start Collaborative Priorities

Smart Start is also working collaboratively to improve NC's early childhood education system and boost NC's economy. Smart Start aims to support the "Workforce Behind the Workforce" by:

- ✓ Expanding Child Care WAGE\$ for early care and education providers to all 100 NC counties, making it statewide.
- ✓ Extending the stabilization grants for compensation to child care providers through June 2025.

Investing in Smart Start means investing in North Carolina.



For over thirty years, Smart Start has been a critical part of NC's early childhood system and has worked to improve outcomes for children, families, teachers, and child care providers—leading to a better future for NC's businesses, our economy, and our state's youngest.

The North Carolina Partnership for Children

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