Early Childhood Education & Development Committee
November 4, 2025, 1:00 – 2:30 pm
200 College St, Room 310

MINUTES

Attendees: Adrian Sandler, Al Whitesides, Carol Steen, Emily Nicholson (virtual), Heather Zanzig (virtual), Jo Jamison, Maia Sloan, Martin Moore, Pat Tuttle, Sara Lappe, Sarah Kabourek (virtual), Stacy Anderson

Staff in attendance: Rachael Sawyer, Amy Broughton, Molly Wilson, Angelyn Johnson

Minutes

- Approval of minutes from October 7, 2025
    - Motion to approve by Martin Moore. Seconded by Carol Steen. The minutes were unanimously approved.

Old Business

- Site visits
    - Site visits conclude this week. Staff will compile all feedback from committee members and share that information at the next meeting.

New Business

- Roundtable Panelists:
    - Amy Barry, Buncombe Partnership for Children
    - Candace Witherspoon, NC Division of Child Development & Early Education
    - Erica Palmer Smith, NC Child
    - Greg Borom, WNC Early Childhood Coalition
    - Phillip Hardin, Buncombe County Health & Human Services
    - Samantha Cole, NC Department of Commerce
- Recent Accomplishments
    - Progress in integrating child care access into workforce and economic development.
    - Greater awareness of the critical importance of affordable, accessible, high quality child care.
    - Updates to the state's Quality Rating Improvement System, allowing multiple pathways for educators and providers.
    - Successful disaster recovery efforts, including direct financial support to providers and staff, and expansion of infant/toddler care slots.
    - Local initiatives, such as dedicated county funds and committees focused on child care, and state extension of teacher compensation grants.
    - Only 1 child care center closure in Buncombe compared to higher instances across the state.
    - No wait list for Child Care Subsidy.
- Child care as Infrastructure
    - Child care is not just a social issue but a systemic resource essential for a healthy economy.
    - Child care access is increasingly viewed as critical infrastructure, akin to utilities and transportation, especially in disaster recovery and community resilience.
- Economic Impact & Policy Advocacy
    - Studies show significant economic returns from investing in high-quality early learning programs (e.g., $5.65 billion ROI for North Carolina).
    - Lack of child care is a major barrier to workforce participation; fixing the system could boost GDP and tax revenues.

    - Advocacy for updating market rates for subsidies, establishing a subsidy floor, and increasing investment to match actual costs of care.
- Workforce Challenges
    - Teacher compensation and retention are major issues; 43% of child care teachers in NC receive some sort of public assistance.
    - The WAGES program provides salary supplements, shown to reduce turnover.
    - Barriers include low pay, lack of benefits, and regulatory challenges for family child care homes.
- Behavioral Health & Social-Emotional Learning
    - Importance of social-emotional learning for children and mental health support for teachers.
    - Stress and low compensation among teachers impact classroom quality and child outcomes.
    - Calls for more training, mental health resources, and systemic support for educators.
- Funding & Subsidy Issues
    - Significant funds for child care subsidies remain unspent due to lack of available slots and low reimbursement rates. Last year, the amount of unspent subsidy funding was $1.7M in Buncombe County, and $56M in the state.
    - Advocacy for updating rates, reducing disparities across counties, and increasing flexibility for local use of funds.
    - Current subsidy rates are based on 75% of 2021 market rates.
    - Subsidy payments are estimated to cover 50-70% of the cost of care.
- Policy Recommendations
    - Top requests: fund a subsidy floor (especially for infants/toddlers), create a statewide WAGES program, and provide child care benefit for child care teachers.
    - Emphasis on the need for systemic investment, public-private partnerships, and local flexibility in using funds.
- Cross-Sector Collaboration
    - Examples of employer-led child care initiatives, such as backup care benefits, and successful public-private collaborations.
    - Encouragement for employers to get involved and for regulatory agencies to support innovative solutions.
- Closing Takeaways
    - Gratitude for the collaborative approach and ongoing dialogue.
    - North Carolina ranks low (34th) in childhood outcomes, highlighting the need for continued investment and innovation.
    - Upcoming meetings will focus on target funding and further action

Announcements

- There will be a special meeting on November 18 at 1:00 pm to discuss the draft project plan for focused investment.

Public Comment

- Stephanie Jones participated in public comment.

Next Meeting

Special meeting to be held November 18, 2025, 1:00-2:30 pm, 200 College St, Room 310.
Next regular meeting will be December 2, 2025, 1:00-2:30 pm, 200 College St, Room 310.