# Buncombe County Early Childhood Committee
# Focused Investment Plan

**PROJECT OVERVIEW**

- **Project Title**: Early Childhood Committee Focused Investment Plan
- **Project Sponsor**: Martin Moore, Committee Chair
- **Project Dates**: August 6, 2024 – July 1, 2027

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**PROJECT PURPOSE**

**The purpose of this project is to define and implement a new focused funding strategy** that:

- Aligns with Buncombe County Board of Commissioners Resolution # 18-10-16: To Create an Early Childhood Education and Development Fund in Buncombe County
- Maximizes local government opportunity to influence positive outcomes within the system of early care and education
- Responds to current conditions within the field of early care & education
- Is informed by community input
- Builds on results-to-date
- Is grounded in best practices from other communities
- Maximizes impact & sustainability

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**PROJECT OBJECTIVES**

- Gather and analyze data on local needs, gaps and priorities
- Review models for local government investment in early care & education
- Engage impacted populations (families, providers, business community)
- Establish funding priorities (continued and/or new)
- Determine performance measures
- Develop a multi-year funding and implementation plan

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**PROJECT BACKGROUND**

**Committee Formation & Grantmaking:** Buncombe County's Early Childhood Education and Development Committee was formed in 2019 with a primary purpose of making investment recommendations to the Board of Commissioners for the County's Early Childhood Education and Development Fund - roughly $4 Million annually. Since FY2020, the Committee has provided annual recommendations for grants to support early care and education for children birth through kindergarten across the following strategies:

- Develop early childhood workforce
- Maintain/enhance existing slots
- Increase slots for enrollment
- Increase quality
- Support families
- Enhance effectiveness of overall system of early care and education

Since its formation, the Committee has recommended funding for an average of 18 projects annually, ranging from $4,999 to $851,411 with an average award amount of $208,619. Funds have been invested in a blend of projects across various priority areas, supporting: operational costs; teacher salaries; behavioral health support; workforce development; expansion supplies; family engagement; and more. All grantees are held accountable through contracts that include reporting on grant spending, activities, and performance measures.

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**Focus on Pre-K Expansion:** In January 2021, the Board of Commissioners charged the Early Childhood Committee with developing recommendations by June 2021 for increasing access to quality pre-kindergarten (including exploring the goal of achieving universal pre-k in Buncombe County). An ad hoc sub-group of the committee worked over the next several months to review data, research models, and analyze options. The recommendation of the group was to invest county resources to enhance the local implementation of the state's NC Pre-K program – rather than to establish a new pre-k model for Buncombe County. The County then contracted with Buncombe Partnership for Children (BPFC) to work with the local preschool planning collaborative to develop a NC-PreK expansion model supporting the following outcomes:

- Increased kindergarten readiness
- Decreased achievement gaps
- More NC Pre-K providers
- More NC Pre-K spots & more children served
- Increased access to NC Pre-K for families/decreased barriers
- Strengthened workforce
- Enhanced data availability and analysis

BPFC conducted community engagement, research, and analysis and designed a program including cost estimates and implementation considerations. The model was presented to the Early Childhood Committee in January 2022, and the committee recommended that the Board of Commissioners fund it as a pilot initiative. BPFC was awarded a 2-year grant from County-directed federal funding (American Rescue Plan Act) to implement the NC Pre-K expansion program from July 1, 2022 through June 30, 2024. After the pilot funding expired, the Early Childhood Committee continued funding this project as a County-funded grant within its Early Childhood Fund recommendations for FY2025 and FY2026.

**Consideration of Additional Focused Investment(s):** In August 2024, the Early Childhood Committee launched a funding strategy series with a goal of affirming a funding strategy for the Early Childhood Education and Development Fund. Two sessions were held, then the work was paused as a result of Tropical Storm Helene. The series re-launched in August 2025. Topics explored include:

- A look at early care & education in Buncombe County, including - licensure, quality, data & context
- How early care & education is paid for: public funding streams for early care & education
- Review of current Buncombe County Early Childhood Fund investment strategy (funds invested in a blend of projects across various priority areas)
- Impacts of Buncombe's Early Childhood Fund & review of results to date (program-level & system-level)
- Exploration of various investment approaches and the impacts associated with each
- Review of trends in early childhood education & potential focused solutions

One theme of discussion was that there is little data to indicate the impact of Buncombe County's Early Childhood Fund at system or community-wide level, despite solid information about the performance of specific grant-funded projects.

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**PROJECT SCHEDULE**

| Timeframe | | Activities/Milestones for Continuity During Planning | Activity/Milestones for Focused Investment(s) |
|---|---|---|---|
| FY2026 | November 2025 | Develop draft grant guidelines for FY2027 funding | Host roundtable of experts in early care & education<br><br>Vote to approve project plan |
| | December 2025 | Approve grant guidelines for FY2027 | Host other NC counties that invest in early care & education<br><br>Provider survey |
| | January 2026 | Release FY2027 application (1/5/26) | Host other NC counties that invest in early care & education<br><br>Community survey |
| | February 2026 | FY2027 applications due (2/20/26 at 12:00) | Discuss focus area(s) to be scoped |
| | March 2026 | Review FY2027 applications | n/a – reserve for application review |
| | April 2026 | Make FY2027 funding recommendations (4/17/26) | n/a – reserve for application review |
| | May 2026 | | Determine focus area(s) to be scoped |
| | June 2026 | Commissioner funding approvals | Engage a 3rd party contractor to design scope(s) for any new focus areas |
| FY2027 | July 2026 | Begin FY2027 contracts | 3rd party contractor to design program scope(s)<br><br>Business survey |
| | August 2026 | | |
| | September 2026 | | |
| | October 2026 | Quarterly reporting | |
| | November 2026 | | |
| | December 2026 | | |
| | January 2027 | Quarterly reporting | Review program designs |
| | February 2027 | | Application process to select vendor(s) for focused investment(s) |
| | March 2027 | | Review proposals |
| | April 2027 | Quarterly reporting | Make FY2028 funding recommendations |
| | May 2027 | | |
| | June 2027 | | Commissioner funding approvals |
| FY2028 | July 2027 | Closeout FY2027 contracts | Begin FY2028 contracts |

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**PROJECT ROLES**

- **Early Childhood Committee:**
  - Approve focused investment project plan
  - Approve grant guidelines for FY2027
  - Review FY2027 applications & Recommend FY2027 awards
  - Select focus investments to be scoped
  - Approve the grant guidelines for FY2028
  - Review FY2028 proposals & Recommend FY2028 awards
- **Buncombe County Strategic Partnerships Staff:**
  - Develop FY2027 grant guidelines
  - Manage FY2027 grant cycle - including applications, contracts, monitoring, and closeout
  - Coordinate committee meeting agendas
  - Create surveys based on committee feedback & collect responses
  - Oversee outside bidding and contracting for services
  - Develop FY2028 grant guidelines to reflect focused investment

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