Buncombe County Early Childhood Community Partner Survey
July 2026

Contents

BACKGROUND & OVERVIEW 2
PARTICIPATION 2
GENERAL FINDINGS 3
Funding Priorities 3
Funding Process 3
SURVEY RESPONSES 4
What do you think worked well about the previous funding priorities and grant process? 4
What challenges did you see with the previous funding priorities and grant process? 4
Potential Funding Priority: Infant & Toddler Slots 5
Potential Funding Priority: NC Pre-K Enhancement 5
Potential Funding Priority: Grants for Workforce Programs 6
Potential Funding Priority: Teacher & Staff Supplements 6
Potential Funding Priority: Pyramid Model 7
Potential Funding Priority: Innovation Grants 8
Are we missing any priorities you think should be considered? 8
Is there anything else you want the committee to know? 8
PARTICIPANT COMMENTS 9
DISCLAIMERS 25

BACKGROUND & OVERVIEW

This survey was conducted on behalf of Buncombe County's Early Childhood Education (ECE) and Development Committee ("the Committee"), whose purpose is to engage with community partners, solicit public input and make policy and investment recommendations to the Board of Commissioners regarding the County's $4 M annual Early Childhood Fund.

In 2024, the committee launched a multi-year focused investment project to define a new funding strategy to improve outcomes and ensure long-term impact and sustainability. The focused investment project plan defines engaging impacted populations as a key objective. The committee formed an engagement work group to define populations and determine engagement methods. The work group defined community partners as a critical population, specifically ECE organizations that have previously applied for and/or received grants from the Early Childhood Fund.

Following its Focused Investment Project Plan, the Committee reviewed investment results and data on current conditions, engaged with from experts in the field, assessed models for local government ECE investment, and began collecting ideas for potential future funding priorities. By 2026, the Committee determined a list of potential funding priorities that they will advance for further consideration. Details have not yet been developed, and some of the priorities may not be selected for inclusion in the final plan based on factors such as scoping, program design, cost. The goal is to finalize new funding priorities by early 2027 and launch a multi-year funding and implementation plan on July 1, 2027.

It is at this important milestone – with a list of potential funding priorities developed but not yet finalized – that the Committee implemented a community partner survey.

The survey was issued via email to all email addresses on file associated with an Early Childhood Fund grant application or award contract over the past 4 years, a total of 95 email addresses. The survey was issued on June 17, 2026, remained open for 5 weeks, with responses due by July 22, 2026. Multiple email reminders were issued during that period, and the survey was also promoted by the Strategic Partnerships Director in one-on-one meetings with directors of FY2027 grantees. Recipients were invited to share their individual feedback, and multiple responses per organization were welcomed.

PARTICIPATION

The survey engaged 31 total participants who provided 399 individual question responses, including 213 comments.

GENERAL FINDINGS

- Across nearly every question, respondents highlighted current strain on the system: staffing shortages; burnout; low compensation; inadequate reimbursement rates; and the difficulty of expanding or sustaining child care services.
- The tone across responses includes substantial appreciation for the County's investment in ECE as well as the Committee's transparency, responsiveness, and willingness to listen to community voices.

Funding Priorities

- **Infant/Toddler Care** had the highest level of support (84%) and was the most unifying with no respondents expressing opposition.
- **NC Pre-K Enhancement** was not as strongly supported as Infant/Toddler but still had a strong majority (74%) with 2 respondents in opposition.
- **Workforce Programs** had the second highest level of support (81%) and only 1 respondent expressing opposition.
- **Teacher Supplements** were also highly supported (81%) with 4 respondents in opposition.
- **Pyramid Model** also had a high level of support (81%) with 4 respondents in opposition.
- **Innovation Grants** had the lowest level of support (65%) with 4 respondents in opposition.
- **Other potential funding priorities** suggested include: support for low-income families; early childhood mental health and social-emotional supports; quality, child development and school readiness priorities; facility updates and small renovations; support for families and caregivers; and support for community-based informal child care providers.

Funding Process

- Respondents praised the funding process for its clarity and good communication.
- Providers consistently expressed preference for multi-year, sustaining funding to improve continuity and program quality, yet some respondents shared concern about favoring certain organizations repeatedly.
- Suggested improvements included more expertise on the committee, more feedback for declined applications, and conflict of interest safeguards.

SURVEY RESPONSES

What do you think worked well about the previous funding priorities and grant process?

Synthesis of 28 responses:

- Clear, simple, and transparent process
- Responsive, knowledgeable county staff
- Flexible funding that supports a broad range of needs
- Strong alignment with early childhood and family priorities
- Support for workforce, quality, and enrollment stability
- Open access that allowed more providers to participate
- Thoughtful, credible review committee structure

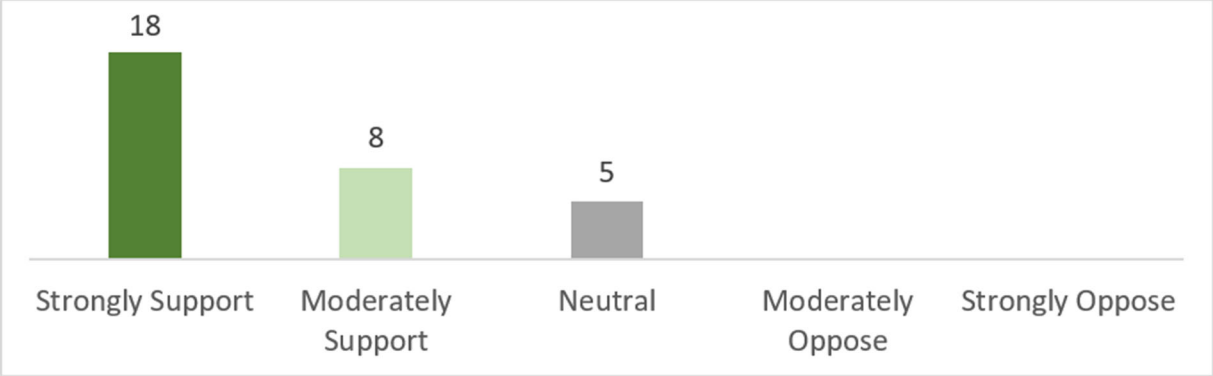
What challenges did you see with the previous funding priorities and grant process?

Synthesis of 28 responses:

- Single-year funding creates instability
- Limited funding relative to community need
- Equity and fairness concerns
- Committee capacity and expertise
- Process challenges
- Broad priorities that are hard to interpret
- Access barriers for smaller or resource-limited applicants

Potential Funding Priority: Infant & Toddler Slots (funding to increase access to high quality early care and education for children birth to age 3)

- **26 out of 31 respondents (84%) support this funding priority.**

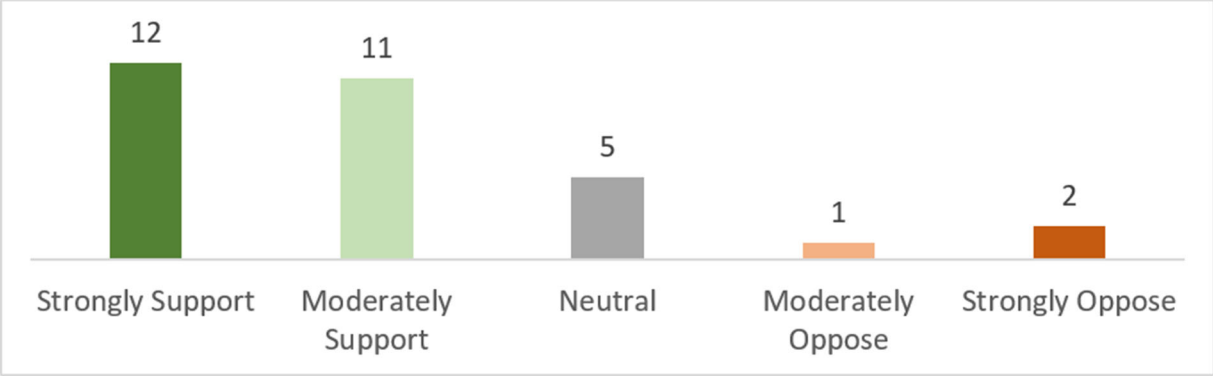


Synthesis of 18 comments:

- Infant/toddler care is a high-need, high-cost area
- Staffing is the main barrier to expansion
- Quality and standards matter
- Costs of creating or converting classrooms is significant
- Prioritization for low-income families
- Need for clarity in how funds can be used
- Broad community impact

Potential Funding Priority: NC Pre-K Enhancement (continuation of the local supplement to the NC Pre-K program, known as "Buncombe Pre-K")

- **23 out of 31 respondents (74%) support this funding priority.**



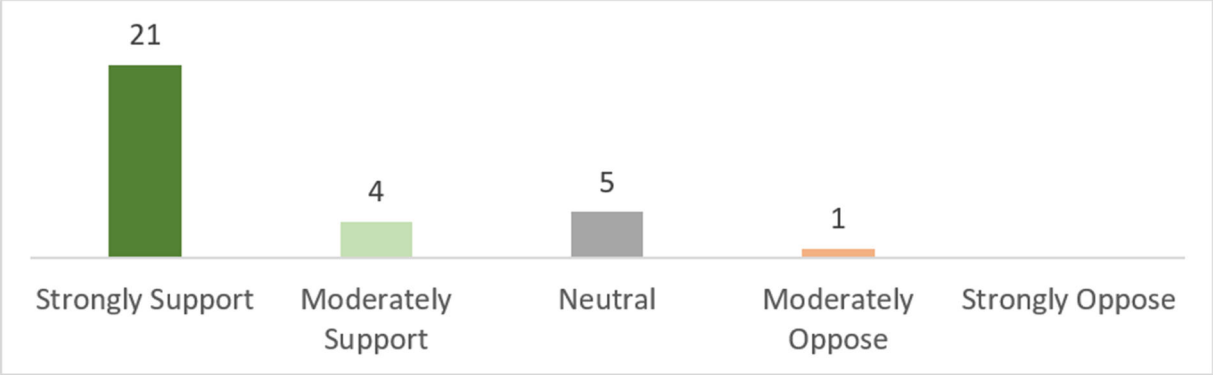
Synthesis of 19 comments:

- NC Pre-K is underfunded without local support
- Supports teacher recruitment, retention and quality
- Enhancement strengthens program quality

- High-quality program standards
- The need to sustain this existing program
- High community value and strong support
- Not all providers participate

Potential Funding Priority: Grants for Workforce Programs (funding for programs that recruit, train, develop, support and retain the ECE workforce)

- **25 out of 31 respondents (81%) support this funding priority.**

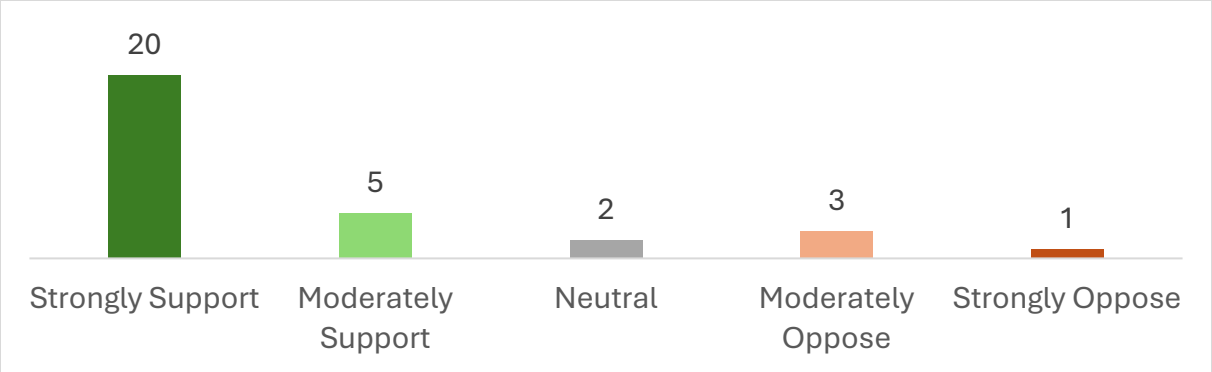


Synthesis of 17 comments:

- Workforce recruitment, retention, and compensation are critical
- Training, career pathways, and ongoing professional development are needed
- Early childhood workforce is still in crisis and needs sustained support
- Quality classrooms depend on a stable workforce
- Mixed feedback on current workforce programs
- Additional supports could strengthen the field

Potential Funding Priority: Teacher & Staff Supplements (payments to early care and education professionals to aid with the recruitment/retention)

- **25 out of 31 respondents (81%) support this funding priority.**

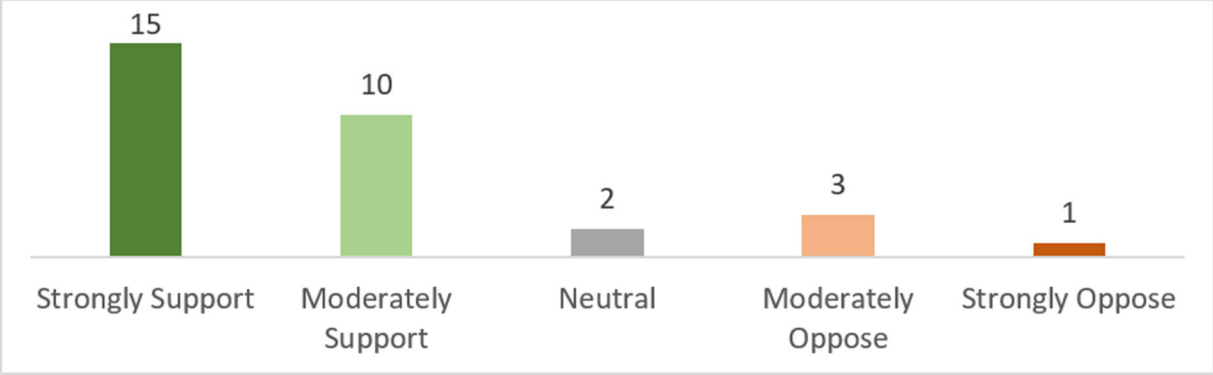


Synthesis of 20 comments:

- Supplements are essential for recruitment and retention
- Wages are far below living-wage levels
- Quality depends on stable, well-paid staff
- Supplements should be equitable and clearly structured
- Supplements should complement but not replace base salary needs
- Benefits and supports also matter
- Mixed opinions about this as a stand-alone funding strategy

Potential Funding Priority: Pyramid Model (funding for programs following evidence-based models to promote healthy social-emotional development in young children)

- **25 out of 31 respondents (81%) support this funding priority.**



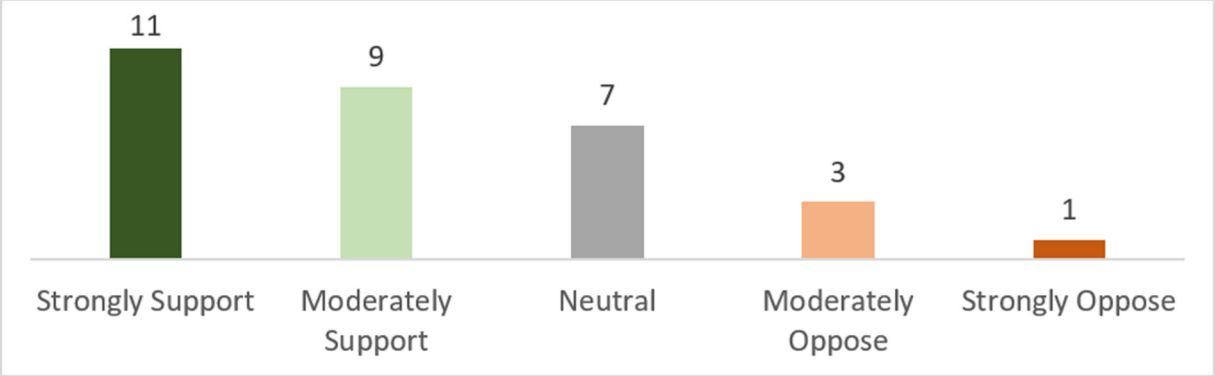
Synthesis of 20 comments:

- Growing social-emotional and behavioral needs
- Pyramid Model can strengthen social-emotional quality and reduce burnout
- Training, coaching, and sustained implementation are essential
- Workforce readiness is a barrier
- Need for clarity and system-wide strategy

- Mixed opinions on whether it should be a funding priority

Potential Funding Priority: Innovation Grants (funding for projects to support creative ideas, provide seed funding and support one-time needs)

- **20 out of 31 respondents (65%) support this funding priority.**



Synthesis of 22 comments:

- Innovation is valuable
- Need for alignment with existing efforts
- Potential for meaningful impact when tied to real needs
- One-time funding is helpful, but sustainability matters
- Timing concerns given current childcare crisis
- Mixed opinions on whether it should be a funding priority

Are we missing any priorities you think should be considered?

Synthesis of 20 responses:

- Stronger workforce supports
- Focus on low-income families
- Early childhood mental health and social-emotional supports
- Quality, child development and school readiness priorities
- Facility updates and small renovations
- Support for families and caregivers
- Support for community-based informal child care providers

Is there anything else you want the committee to know?

Synthesis of 21 responses:

- Deep appreciation for the Committee's work
- Importance of sustaining existing high-quality programs

- Early childhood education and child care as essential infrastructure
- Need for continued workforce investment
- Support for children with higher needs
- Attention to family, friend and neighbor care and non-traditional hours
- Value of community and cultural identity
- Care around conflicts of interest and process fairness

PARTICIPANT COMMENTS

What do you think worked well about the previous funding priorities and grant process?

- Addressing support for early educators is essential to being able to address other issues such as enrollment, quality, and family support!
- Allowing early ed centers to receive the money directly.
- Applications are easy to complete and time frames for submission are easy to accomplish.
- Buncombe County Schools greatly appreciates the opportunity to apply for and receive grant funding to support our Learning Labs program. This funding allowed us to operate 4 five-star programs that connected directly to every ECE priority, which we are able to do in large part because of this funding.
- Funding many non profits
- Grant process was easy to follow and staff was very helpful and prompt with answering questions.
- Having BunCo devote a grant specifically to the youngest and most vulnerable learners in our society is a huge win, especially as it can be such a big funding gap on the state and federal levels. Thank you for continuing to prioritize that.
- I appreciated the transparency in the grant review process, especially receiving the compiled comments, rankings, different scenarios for funding etc.
- I believe that the funding priorities are aligned with what families and childcare stakeholders need at this time.
- I think that having an open application process made funding available to more providers. The application itself is relatively simple, and county staff are very open to offering support!
- I think the process worked well.

- increase in slots, I appreciate the support to NCPK slots to support quality and increased salaries.
- Investing in the childcare workforce and maintaining preschool enrollment capacity supports the broader county workforce by ensuring that working families have access to reliable, high quality early childhood education and care.
- Irene Wortham Center relies heavily on the generosity of Buncombe County to operate successfully. We are very grateful and fortunate to have been able to offer high-quality care and early education for many families last year.
- Our organization appreciated how funding priorities included quality, support and effectiveness, which allowed applicants who didn't squarely fall into "slots" to access critical funding for supporting things like early literacy. Our Early Childhood ecosystem is one of the central players in equipping young children with the tools they need to be ready to learn in kindergarten. Even if slots are filled, without the quality and support to make it effective, centers become day cares rather then early childhood *education* centers. It is an important distinction.
- Providing documentation that previous goals were met, before any new goals are approved has been a great process to ensure that a Center is able to meet any new projects.
- Supporting more than just ECE projects/programs. I love that you're willing to support staff salaries, building maintenance, etc. Few grants are willing to cover overhead like the Buncombe County grant will.
- Teachers were prioritized, families were supported
- The application length was reasonable, and the process seemed to move quickly. Communication with County staff was excellent.
- The application process was straightforward, instructions were clear, deadlines were easy to meet. The requirements were broad enough to allow for creative problem solving with programs but also straightforward to provide direct support where needed.
- The brorad range of areas supported.
- The committee members come from a range of perspectives and truly care about making the right decisions to benefit our early education community. Content experts presenting to committee members with current information and trends in the field is very wise and informative. The guidelines and application process have been clear and transparent. I can only imagine how difficult it must be to have grant-making deliberations observed by potential grant recipients!

- The funding has been helpful in hiring and retaining staff. With better staffing and retention, we have been able to increase and maintain enrollment as well as bring better quality to the program. The funding for NC PreK was extremely helpful in bringing in qualified, experienced teachers, and keeping them.
- The funding priorities and grant process have always been clear, predictable, and transparent.
- The grant application was straight forward, the timeline was transparent and communication was efficient
- The previous funding priorities and grant process allowed creativity to meet current needs, and flexibility to apply to fund creative solutions to identified community needs.
- The staff understanding of the issues and how to address them.
- We believe it was the right decision to place our trust in El Telar and give them an opportunity—as they operate somewhat outside conventional structures—thereby enabling the organization to continue providing support and stability to home-based childcare providers.

What challenges did you see with the previous funding priorities and grant process?

- Decision makers from the funding and grant process did not always reflect a deep understanding of early childhood ecosystem policy levels, challenges, etc. Nor the education aspect, i.e. what access and early literacy opportunities truly do to level kids up for kindergarten.
- Having to apply for funding each year for continued program funding.
- Having to apply yearly and the need/demand vs. the supply (funding).
- I do not have any issues or concerns regarding last year's funding.
- I feel the previous funding priorities were not equal across all sectors. This in turn made the process political. Programs would score high on the scoring and still not receive funding for various reasons.
- I think a better job can be done of connecting issues other than the numbers centers and seats within Early Childhood. Seeing the connectedness between high quality education, investment in continued education, incentivizing and creating high paying opportunities, transportation and enrichment, caregiver classes, are creative and impactful ways to make an impact in the early childhood landscape. I also believe there is an opportunity to ensure that the committee is fully equipped to make informed decisions about the given field they're making funding decisions on.

- Infant care is still a shortage and highly expensive, Workforce is still unstable despite incentives
- Length of approval, one year is a short term.
- Limited budget for the amount of childcare centers in the area.
- No challenges, but it seems like individual child care centers with resources applied and those who could have benefited most did not have the resources to apply. There were also several requests for center operating funds and many similar positions that could have been better served by a community-wide program.
- Not every committee member is deeply knowledgeable about the field of early education, which is to be expected with the diverse membership that is healthy for a committee such as this. The grant making meetings have seemed rather compressed with intense time pressure, making me wonder if having grants due sooner might help to decompress the decision-making timeframe?
- Our agency has not had challenges
- preference seemed to be given to a few organizations whiles others were "blacklisted" by a particular commissioner.
- Rising expenses for staffing, benefits, supplies, facility maintenance, and compliance requirements created challenges in maintaining program quality and enrollment capacity.
- Securing funding
- Seems like many of the same organizations apply year after year. I think I even saw in one case the same amount requested. How can the fund help them become self-sustaining? Also - I attended one public meeting, and it seemed there were some clear favorite organizations among committee members. How can you improve the process where there are conflicts of interest?
- Single-year funding made it nearly impossible to hire personnel with grant funds.
- The biggest challenge is that there is not an option for multi-year funding.
- The biggest challenge was wondering if we were eligible, but a quick trip to your office assured me we were.
- The challenge with annual funding of projects and priorities that were beyond annual solutions lead to significant uncertainty whether projects would continue. The fickle nature of committee funding decisions led to some project being cut and or not funded based on committee member feelings about certain organizations.
- The funding priorities are very broad. This can make it difficult to determine what to request in a proposal. It is also more of a burden on grant recipients to have to request funding every year. Multi-year awards are often more impactful.

- The language barrier was a challenge. Meetings with the board were sometimes a bit tense due to comments made by certain individuals. The report format was also somewhat unclear at first. Furthermore, presenting year-end reports via Zoom was not the best way to share the results; in-person presentations were always better.
- The main challenge is the year to year cycle. A multi-year cycle would be most helpful. It would give added child care security to our BCS teachers whose children are enrolled in the program, and job security to our program staff. Multi-year funding would also support a long-term strategic planning process within our organization that would enhance program quality.
- The process seems to be working well, providing new opportunities to Centers with additional funding is an excellent way to improve and increase services to children.
- The timing is always a little tight with other deadlines, but that's the nature of that time of year.
- There was no feedback received pertaining to grant declination.
- There's scarce funding available so efforts become competitive when they should be collaborative!

Provide any comments on the potential funding priority: Infant & Toddler Slots

- Because working-class families need the assurance that their children are well cared for in places that provide a sense of trust and safety. The second reason is that this is a crucial age for human development.
- Funding Subsidy Based Non profits working with daycares
- High need for this age group.
- I think there would have to be clarity around what the committee means by "increase access to high quality early care and education". Family child care is an excellent option for infants and toddlers, and is very limited in Buncombe County. Would these investments be targeted to certain types of care? How do they define "high quality"?
- Important but there should be a standard for staff and how long the slots are available, Will they always needs grant funds.
- Infant and toddler slots are very expensive, but a high need in the community. Funds should be prioritized for children and families living on low incomes with high needs.
- Infant toddler care is hard to find in this community. It is also very costly.
- Infant/toddler slots are the highest need in our community.

- The biggest barrier to expanding infant/toddler capacity in existing licensed centers is that they don't have enough staff. Funding infant/toddler expansion without staff to support will not be effective. I recognize the high need for funding to expand these slots, but ONLY if there is also significant workforce support at the same time.
- The county desperately needs more infant toddler slots
- The goals of this strategy can be met with about $50,000 of funding per year. Some funding needs are capital improvements and county funds can't pay for those outside school-owned property.
- There a currently long waitlist for high quality infant toddler early care, increase the slots should not mean increasing numbers of children enrolled per teacher. Ideally it means ratios are low and new high quality classrooms are established.
- There is a great need for infant care. As an early learning provider, transforming a classroom to serve infants can be costly, especially when factoring in the required classroom environment, equipment, and licensing standards. In addition, finding qualified teachers who understand the unique needs and dynamics of infant care can be challenging and expensive. Staff training and pay incentives are necessary to support quality infant care and help recruit and retain qualified educators.
- There is a very high need for infant and toddler slots for families in Buncombe County. We have a very long waitlist and hope to be able to serve more families in the coming year
- This is a critical area, that costs Centers additional funds, and should include funds for expansion of building space, as most centers are at max in their physical location.
- Well, the shortage in our area is notable and prevents many parents from returning to work. There are only so many centers that are certified to care for the very youngest infants, which is a big problem.
- While there is a great demand, there are additional supports that centers need in place to meet the state requirements for this age. Especially when there are programs who have had to close completely.
- YES. Much needed.

Provide any comments on the potential funding priority: NC Pre-K Enhancement

- Funding for infant and toddler slots is a priority because there is a significant shortage of available care for children in this age group within the county. Infant and toddler classrooms require lower staff-to-child ratios, specialized equipment, and

higher operating costs, making them more expensive to maintain than preschool classrooms.

- Important since this funds quality and there are checks to verify.
- Materials and training that meet the needs for Pre-K enhancement
- My organization has been able to increase the number of NC Pre-K slots we have because of the county's investments in this program. The state investment alone makes it financially difficult for providers to participate.
- NC Pre-K funding does not cover the true cost of care, and this supplement makes it possible for many programs in our community to afford to build this program into their operating budgets.
- NC pre-K is such an important program. I think it's important. We support the parents with wraparound care.
- NC Pre-K requires teachers to hold a BK license and be paid in accordance with public school teacher salary rates. Supplemental funding is helpful in recruiting qualified teachers who can provide high-quality instruction and remain in the program, rather than leaving for school system positions that may offer higher pay and stronger benefits. This funding supports competitive wages and helps cover benefits, both of which are important for attracting and retaining quality staff.
- Program must continue, especially if public schools would expand space, as every child should be able to start Pre_k.
- The committee should ensure funding is equitably distributed to all NC Pre-K providers.
- This is one of two top priorities for me because the results show this strategy works on teacher retention.
- very important in order to keep turnover down.
- We do not offer NC Pre-K at this time
- YES! The state doesnt fully fund the cost of the program. The additional supplement was very helpful ensuring we could meet the demands to pay the teacher.
- YES. Need to maintain and improve.

Provide any comments on the potential funding priority: Grants for Workforce Programs

- Also programs to help the workforce advance! Many caregivers are quite dedicated and want this to be a career.
- Any additional funding to Centers should include enough funds to allow Centers to pay a salary that is equivalent to any good salary that meets the needs of staff.

- Apprenticeship program is important to our program.
- Being able to provide staff bonuses and/or raises is an important part of staff retention. A program cannot build strong educational quality for students when staff retention is low. It is both time-consuming and costly to continuously recruit, hire, and orient new staff, only to lose them because of insufficient pay. Investing in staff compensation helps create stability, strengthens classroom quality, and supports better outcomes for children.
- Childcare is a critical component of workforce infrastructure. Funding that supports childcare staff, maintains enrollment capacity, and expands infant and toddler care helps families remain employed and provides employers with a more stable and reliable workforce.
- Early childhood education workforce is experiencing as a huge strain and we need all the help we can get to keep our employees
- Early childhood is in crisis, retention is key but that requires thoughtful and evidenced based strategies for increasing confidence, hearty and sustainable help with environment and classroom management strategies so that teachers can once again focus on the joy of teaching. Teacher wellness and wellbeing is important as well, the profession is not easy and the demands can be exhausting. There may opportunities for creative and impactful workforce development programs.
- I didnt see many fruits of this effort and believe this money could be better allocated towards teacher and staff supplements. Especially when there are so many other programs across the state helping in this effort.
- I'm not seeing the benefits of this at this time. It would be great to have pool of substitutes. I know the partnership is doing this but it is hard to get one through them.
- These types of investments need to span multiple years in order to demonstrate any progress. One year of a workforce program is not going to have significant impact on the overall workforce.
- This is how we can afford to build systems of support for educators, and all the other parts of the B-5 system rely on it
- This is very much needed as the cost of living in Buncombe county remains high and wages can't keep up. This also allows for a broad range of local nonprofits to offer wrap around support.
- This s one of two top priorities for me because workforce remains our greatest need in the field: recruiting, training, and retaining. We have positive results with

technical assistance, coaching, and training programs, but resources need to be increased. These programs are effective, but labor intensive.

- We all know that our workforce needs to be better supported in so many ways. In addition to more money (Teacher & Staff Supplements), they need stronger initial training, more paid continued education opportunities, and an increase in apprenticeship-style learning.
- What are the outcomes? Has these funds really added to the workforce?
- Without a competent workforce, we cannot offer any high-quality child care in our community!
- Without this critical element of the industry, recruitment would suffer even more than it currently does. Many of our high school students choose early childhood as a career because of our CTE Early Childhood courses.

Provide any comments on the potential funding priority: Teacher & Staff Supplements

- Addressing supplements has the potential to greatly enhance recruitment and retention, which are critical to quality programming.
- Base salary should be provided that meets the cost for living. Why add supplements?
- Higher pay is critical for retention of qualified teaching staff
- Hiring and retaining teachers at a rate that allows them to live comfortably while being mindful of our tuition rate and payroll costs is becoming one of our most difficult budget line items.
- If we can't retain our best people (they will get paid way more as a nanny or Behavior Technician), we are never going to attain sustainable, high-quality care. This should be our number one priority. Increased wages as well as mandated insurance and paid sick and vacation leave.
- Incentives are a strong staff retention strategy. Teachers and staff are more likely to remain committed to their work when they receive meaningful benefits, competitive pay, and additional supports that recognize the value of their role.
- Our hardworking, talented, and education teachers require more compensation to live and work in our county. Keeping high-quality teachers is a priority for the entire community.
- Our public school K-12 teachers receive supplements for various reasons. It would be great to give our ECE teachers a supplement as well.
- Retention of staff is necessary for maintaining continuity of care.

- roviding teacher and staff supplements strengthens the childcare workforce by improving employee retention and job satisfaction. Stable staffing ensures continuity of care for children and helps maintain the availability of childcare services that support working families throughout the county.
- Seems difficult to identify who gets it, how much, and distribute equitably. Could instead distribute it at the center level (by enrollment?), then they can pass it to teachers how they see fit. Cash gift or other appreciation food/items/event
- Specifically retention
- Staff funding for teacher training after duty hours
- Teacher pay is one of the biggest issues facing child care providers. The stabilization grant funds that came to NC via ARPA helped a lot, and we are now having to figure out how to maintain the increased pay rates without the funds to support them.
- The committee should ensure funding is equitably distributed to all providers.
- The statewide WAGE$ program already exists. While $4 million in additional investments will help, I don't believe it will be enough money to produce the desired results.
- There should be some standard these funds raise the staff to, not just more money
- There's less teacher turnaround when teachers feel appreciated and are making a living wage
- Very few early education professionals early a Living Wage, and pay supplements are critical for attracting and retaining professionals in the field.
- YES!!!!! Please continue to fund this effort. Early Ed is the foundational start for ones education journey. Without QUALIFIED teachers, the foundation is non existent and it will be difficult for students to continue to build on it. With the high cost of living this is a difficult field to staff to begin with.

Provide any comments on the potential funding priority: Pyramid Model

- All programs should be using the pyramid model without need for committee funding. The Partnership could be funding and supporting this effort.
- As our society is in so much turmoil, families are suffering, children reflecting the emotional strain, more support is needed to help Centers in dealing with children that are having emotional difficulties.
- Behavior needs are increasing across the field and staff are falling behind in appropriate training. DD slots are extremely hard to staff.
- Challenging behaviors are a major cause of teacher burnout. Teachers and children deserve safe learning environments. The Pyramid Model is a great start!

- Early care and education is in great need of new teachers to replace those that are retiring and to retain those who are still in the field.
- Funding to support Pyramid Model implementation helps strengthen the quality of early childhood programs by providing teachers with effective strategies to promote children's social-emotional development and address challenging behaviors. This approach contributes to positive classroom climates, increased teacher effectiveness, and improved outcomes for children and families.
- I don't really know what this is.
- I would love to be a trainer on this topic. I think that this model is effective and supportive of early learning programs and environments that support children. I do think that it is important to provide this funding to programs who can adopt and model while also offering funds for new programs and educators to learn the techniques.
- Implementing Pyramid model across early childhood systems can be one solution to training and retention. because it focuses on universal trauma informed training, effective Pyramid Model implementation can increase confidence and quality by focusing and building upon a teachers strengths. Therefore, PM has a ripple effect on the social emotional health of the entire classroom. It is also know that one time training and coaching without support is not enough to create lasting change. Funding for Pyramid Model will allow implementation to continue.
- It is unclear to me how this would benefit the ECE system in Buncombe County as described. If every provider understood and used the pyramid model, it would definitely help. If this type of investment would involve an intentional training and implementation plan for all providers in the county, it could work. Otherwise, it's not truly utilizing the model. The foundation of the pyramid is an effective workforce, which may be a more impactful focus area for investment.
- Pyramid model is very important and should be supported in each early learning center
- So many staff do not have the foundation to support children with higher needs. This hands on training and support helps the teachers and children first hand.
- The Pyramid Model is an important framework that can support positive social-emotional development and classroom practices. Offering training for center staff and directors may help expand understanding of the model and support its implementation across more centers.
- The Pyramid model should be considered a workforce program because it is a coaching strategy. While an effective framework, current coaching has been

focused on changing negative child behaviors. Pyramid model training and implementation for staff can be very time intensive. It is also funded by Smart Start.

- There is already SO MUCH support for the push-out of social-emotional and behavioral models, but it tends to divert resources to "changing child behavior" which is the wrong improvement driver of systemic change to build a more inclusive and high quality ECE system of care
- This is a top priority for our program and it works. There are a lot of resources involved but at the same time, you have to be connected to a local public district.
- This is also very important, for the healthy development of young children and the early education workforce.
- Though I truly believe this is VERY important, our teachers are lacking even basic education on teaching early childhood. I support this, but our priority should be retention before significant training.
- We need more information about it.
- YES!!!! We continue to see an increase In challenging behaviors and the additional mental health supports are needed for the students, teachers, and families.

Provide any comments on the potential funding priority: Innovation Grants

- Again, this is a great funding option, but not on the front burner given the childcare crisis Buncombe County is in.
- Always should fund innovation.
- I agree with folks who, in the last committee meeting, mentioned that it would be good to allocate a portion of the committee's funding allocation to this purpose. This would help the committee be responsive to emerging needs.
- I do not have any thoughts at this time
- I support these IF they can meaningfully connect with, collaborate with, and strengthen existing initiatives, rather than further fragmentation and everyone taking chunks of money to do niche things here and there
- I think it's important that innovation grants continue because each organization has a different nature and it's important to support those because not all organizations look the same
- I think its always a good idea to allow for creative funding solutions!
- Innovation grants are essential to support creative solutions to community needs.
- More funds are needed to provide more space, and as mentioned in 8, the emotional aspects of children needs to be a priority as children and families are suffering.

- New ideas and people help diversify and support the broader childhood education network.
- Innovation grants have value; however, sustaining quality care, retaining qualified staff, and maintaining access to high-quality preschool and childcare services are more pressing needs. Long-term investments in workforce support and program stability produce lasting benefits for children, families, employers, and the community.
- Our aging daycare needs some updating. The past grant helped improve the playroom with new flooring but we have too many old toys (need educational toys) books and furniture. These come at a cost that is not budgeted.
- Seed funding is always good
- The creativity and imagination required to be a successful teacher cannot be overstated. Providing funding for innovation, projects, and expanded opportunities for students in critical for high-quality education.
- The idea of having a fund for innovation or emergencies sounds like a great idea, but it seems to conflict with the current purpose of the fund.
- There are so many grant initiatives that look at supporting new initiatives verses investing in the sustainability of proven systems. I think this investment could be more strategic and wisely pivoted to support operationally a model/program/organization with a proven track record.
- This would be another priority. Oftentimes, we have ideas but no funding to pull them off and enhance the daily activities for children. One idea is sensory play and adding sensory materials to the classroom.
- Though not opposed to innovation grants, I believe there are more basic critical needs in early childhood than creativity. I do not support using funds this way until the industry is more stable.
- We always want to leave the door open for creative solutions and new ideas.
- We suggest that the financing be spread over several years, allowing for project monitoring and the provision of support as needs arise.
- YES!! Creativity is one of the pillars inn my belief when it comes to education. If there are ways that we can enhance the field in IMPACTFUL and SUSTAINABLE ways not thought of previously, I am all for it!
- YES. Specifically, if a program is addressing or will be supporting families with needs that current programs are either unable to meet.

Are we missing any priorities you think should be considered?

- Establish a "permanent" paid substitute pool - 10 to 15 subs being paid full-time to rotate where they are needed. 2. Program for train experienced teachers as mentors and cooperating teachers.
- A stronger focus on funding projects that prioritize children and families living on low incomes with high needs. It is unconscionable and terrible public policy to use significant taxpayer funds to support middle income families, when there are so many children and families living on low incomes with high needs that remain unserved.
- Consideration should also be given to small renovations. Licensed programs must meet specific requirements for classroom environments and equipment, which may require minor renovations, facility updates, or equipment upgrades to ensure compliance.
- Early Childhood Mental Health is extremely important and now more then ever, investments should include ECMH initiatives.
- Early literacy - it lends itself to language development, SEL, kindergarten-readiness, and builds capacity within ECE organizations themselves.
- Ensure committee members supporting these efforts bring expertise, curiosity, and support to the table. Get out and get involved in what may be new or unfamiliar. Seeing funding going to the same orgs or programs year over year may be creating funding disparities across the county.
- Family Engagement; potential volunteer stipend program
- Have you asked the teachers what they want?
- Helping to support the benefits or retirement plans for Early Ed workers (not just the teachers). Maybe the county can help match retirement rates so that's not on the employer.
- I believe countywide insurance for staff members working in early chosen education would be a nice conversation to start
- I don't think so.
- Missing from these priorities are some aspects of academic rigor that lead to kindergarten readiness and lessen achievement disparities later. As well as measures that support learners' caregivers whether by equipping them with more knowledge or helping them to gain access to programs through support with forms and information on what is available as a resource to their families.
- N/A
- Nope. You all are doing an amazing job advocating for this group of Buncombe County residents with the given resources.

- Not at this time. The committee has done a thorough job of research and prioritization.
- Our community is in need of stable, consistent, high-quality care and education. Grants are crucial for operation and continued success
- perhaps a database with lists of potential staff candidates
- School Readiness and Kindergarten Transition: Literacy and language development, Family engagement activities, Transition programs between preschool and kindergarten, Early intervention services.
- Somehow rewarding centers that maintain ratios that are below the allowable level. I find it frankl horrifying to think of one (likely minimally trained) teacher in a classroom with 10 2-yr olds. And I really feel for the parents who either don't know how unsafe this is or do not have the means to choose a daycare with a reduced ratio.
- We suggest considering grants for community organizations and programs—such as El Telar—that focus on training and skill development for individuals who provide childcare for families, neighbors, and friends. In doing so, we provide children in the community with the chance to thrive and access the same opportunities available to other children. The community takes care of the community.

Is there anything else that you want the committee to know?

- As a previous receipient of funds and other activities related to children here in Buncombe, I just want to personally express my deep appreciation for the support and work that the committee does for the children in the County. THANK YOU!
- Everything is appreciated to increase quality of care in Buncombe County.
- Funding that sustains existing high quality programs can have a greater impact than funding new initiatives. Programs need stable, predictable resources to maintain staffing, quality standards, and enrollment capacity over time. Early childhood programs are not only educational services, they are essential workforce infrastructure. When childcare programs are adequately funded, parents can work, employers experience fewer workforce disruptions, and communities benefit economically. While expanding services is important, preserving existing infant, toddler, and preschool slots is equally critical. Losing established classrooms or experienced staff can have long term consequences for community access to care. Funding should consider initiatives that build a sustainable early childhood workforce pipeline, including internships, career exploration, and professional development opportunities. These efforts help prepare emerging educators, support

career advancement, and ensure that early childhood programs have a strong, qualified workforce to meet community needs. Kindergarten transition programming should be recognized as a priority investment because it creates continuity between preschool and elementary school, reduces barriers to school entry, supports family engagement, and promotes positive educational outcomes. Children who experience successful transitions are better positioned to thrive in kindergarten and beyond. Funding that supports transition activities, collaboration between preschool and school personnel, and family outreach.

- I am sure you look at the outcomes of current funding and community comments, Thank you for tackling this community problem.
- I appreciate your intentionality in this transparent and important volunteer work!
- I want to thank the committee for being committed to Early Childhood in Buncombe county and for valuing the work that our educators do everyday. We must invest in the early years as we know how critical brain development during the first 5 years of life is. Thank you for taking the time to listen to community feedback as you are locating a securing funding.
- Irene Wortham Center serves many children that might not be able to find care elsewhere in the community due to special needs, behavioral, developmental delays and medical needs. We are proud to serve Buncombe County families and will continue to deliver our services thoughtfully and professionally.
- I've appreciated the openness of this process and being able to participate.
- N/A
- Please continue to advocate for Early Ed in all areas of your individual lives. SO often we are overlooked, underpaid, and overworked but yet we persist for the love of the students. It's nice to know we have others pouring into us while we pour into these future generations.
- So much of the care of young children happens outside of a licensed care setting. Be aware of the prevalence of Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) care as you build out your investment strategy. There are also a lot of families who work non-traditional hours. Their options for care are even more limited. Perhaps consider ways county funds could help expand options for these families as well.
- Thank you again for considering innovative proposals with a community and cultural focus.
- Thank you for seeking our feedback. BCS remains incredibly grateful for the committee's support over the years. Please don't hesitate to reach out to our team with any questions you may have.

- Thank you for your support!
- Thank you so much for supporting Early Childhood Education! It is making a difference.
- The committee should be careful when using the Buncombe Partnership for Children for information or as 'independent experts' in local early childhood education. The Partnership has a significant conflict of interest as grantees receiving significant amounts of committee funding.
- There was much discussion on the different funding scenarios. Seems like the committee could come up with more of a rules based approach that is agreed upon ahead of time, then validated once the actual results come in.
- You could also consider capping the funding amount to any one organization, or capping the number of programs any one organization can apply for grant funding for.
- We are extremely appreciative of your support and investment in our children
- We love that the County values early childhood education!
- Yes, prioritize other non profits within Cary and Wake, they also work with Buncombe
- Yes. I would like the committee to know that early childhood education programs are doing essential work, but many providers are carrying significant financial and operational challenges in order to maintain quality care for children and families.
- There is a continued need for funding that supports staff compensation, bonuses, benefits, training, classroom improvements, and equipment upgrades. Licensed programs must meet specific requirements, and even small changes, such as opening an infant classroom or improving classroom environments, can be costly. Providers need support in recruiting and retaining qualified teachers because quality early childhood education depends on stable, well-trained, and fairly compensated staff.
- The first five years of a child's life are critical for developing the foundational skills that support long-term success, healthy development, and responsible citizenship.

DISCLAIMERS

Parts of this analysis were assisted by Microsoft Copilot, an AI tool that helped synthesize and summarize content. All findings, interpretations, and conclusions were reviewed and finalized by Strategic Partnerships staff. Participant comments are included as submitted.