

THE PRE·K PRIORITY

FAQ:

BENEFITS OF HIGH-QUALITY PRE-K

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What are the benefits of high-quality Pre-K? Why is it so important?

Children who have a high-quality Pre-K experience are more likely to succeed in school and in life. Research shows that high-quality Pre-K:

- + Nurtures a child's brain during the critical early years of life – academically, socially, and emotionally
- + Reduces the need for special education (and the related cost)
- + Helps close educational achievement gaps; and increases test scores, high school graduation rates, and college attendance
- + Increases self-sufficiency in the future by increasing the likelihood of a full-time job and home ownership
- + Allows families to pursue employment knowing their children are safe and receiving high-quality care
- + Delivers \$7.00 in long-term economic savings on every \$1.00 invested



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What does “high-quality” Pre-K mean?

A high-quality Pre-K program is centered around learning and education that is structured but incorporates guided and free play. The curriculum is informed by educational research and designed with an emphasis on social and emotional development; addressing cognitive, physical, and behavioral aspects.

Programs incorporate a structured plan for children’s successful transition to Kindergarten and foster an environment that values parent/family input and engagement. Programs operate a 6.5-hour day, include nutritious meals and health screenings, and have a teacher-to-child ratio no higher than 1-to-10 with a maximum of 20 children per classroom. Teachers are required to have higher education credentials and are provided ongoing professional development.

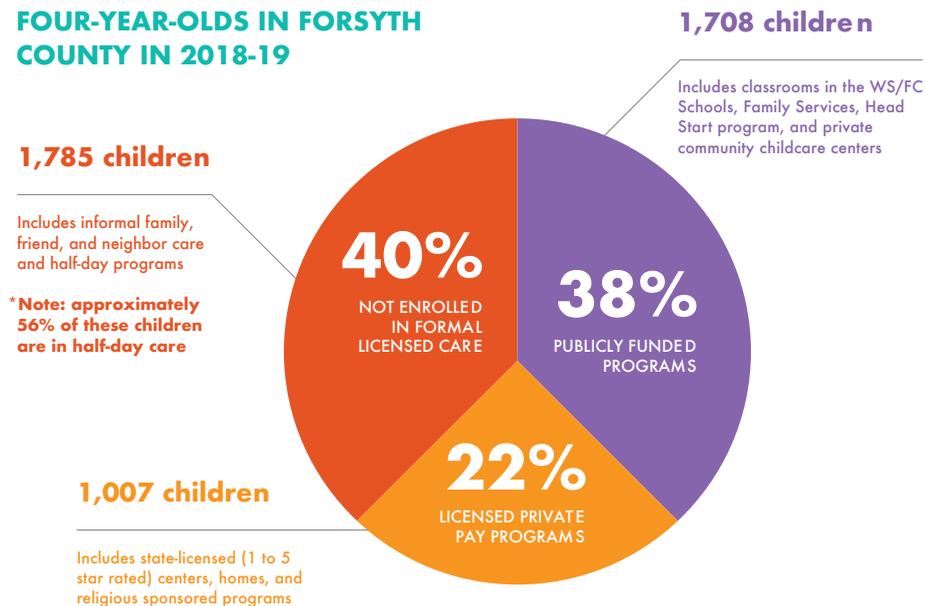
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Don’t we already have high-quality Pre-K programs?

Many Pre-K programs in Forsyth County operate on a solid foundation of quality, especially those with 4- and 5- star licensed ratings and publicly-funded Head Start and NC Pre-K classrooms that require higher standard benchmarks. While other programs are striving to meet higher quality standards, they frequently lack the resources and funding to achieve the established benchmarks.

In fact, an expanded Pre-K system will require a significant increase in the capacity of local organizations that currently provide quality programs, as well as those organizations that aspire to bring their programs into compliance with higher quality standards.

CHILDCARE LANDSCAPE FOR FOUR-YEAR-OLDS IN FORSYTH COUNTY IN 2018-19



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What kind of training/credentials are required of teachers in a high-quality Pre-K class?

Pre-K Lead Teachers must have a minimum of a Bachelor’s degree, preferably in early childhood, child development, or a related field, and also have specialized training related to Pre-K. Teachers that hold a BK (Birth through Kindergarten) license can be more highly compensated. It is highly encouraged, and in some publicly funded programs mandated, that Lead Teachers have OR be working toward BK licensure.

Pre-K Teacher Assistants must have or be working towards a minimum of an Associate’s degree in early childhood education or hold the nationally recognized Child Development Associate (CDA) credential.

THE PRE-K PRIORITY:

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What is The Pre-K Priority, and how does it relate to the Pre-K programs/schools that currently exist?

The Pre-K Priority is a coalition of community organizations and individuals committed to high-quality Pre-K for every four-year-old child in Forsyth County. Our goal is to expand a mixed system of Pre-K providers (mixed programs in public schools, Head Start, and community-based centers, including private childcare centers) that builds on existing programs to ensure greater access, affordability, and quality for all families who want to enroll their child.

An expanded system will enroll more children in programs that meet quality benchmarks, assist providers that aspire to higher quality standards, and potentially establish new programs.



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Who is involved in The Pre-K Priority?

A group of early childhood education (ECE) professionals and advocates came together in 2014 to explore how to offer high-quality Pre-K education for every four-year-old child in Forsyth County. The initiative is convened by Family Services and now includes more than 60 individuals from ECE organizations, Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools, public agencies, philanthropic partners, and parents.

Through the work of a steering committee, various work groups, and community supporters, a comprehensive road map was shaped in the report Building the Foundation for the Future of Forsyth County (view online at reports.prekpriority.org). A large-scale public education and engagement campaign began in the fall of 2019 to raise awareness and mobilize public support for high-quality Pre-K.

COST:

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How will the expansion of new Pre-K classrooms and/or the improved quality of current Pre-K settings be funded?

Financing a broad, high-quality Pre-K system will include existing funding streams in addition to new revenue sources. While approximately 2,700 of 4,500 four-year-olds in Forsyth County currently attend a licensed Pre-K program, there is no uniform system for funding them. Federal and state dollars fund placement for children with disabilities and for children whose families meet eligibility guidelines for low-income, while other families pay tuition (commonly known as “private pay”). The various organizations in Forsyth County that manage the federal and state monies actively collaborate to blend the funding to maximize the number of children served.

New public and private sources (that are to be determined) will depend upon the support of the public and our elected officials. Additional funding from a combination of local, state, and federal government sources along with philanthropic support will be needed.



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What about Project Impact and the money it has invested for Pre-K?

In 2016, a private individual/corporate-led initiative called Project Impact pledged funding over six years to help the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools (WS/FCS) address the critical student achievement gaps of its youngest students. Increasing the number of Pre-K classrooms and raising the quality of the Pre-K experience has been part of this initiative. However, further expansion of space and sustainability of funds could become a concern in the future. The WS/FCS Project Impact Executive Director is actively partnering with The Pre-K Priority to support the vision of increasing high-quality Pre-K opportunities.

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How is the work of The Pre-K Priority funded?

A Great Expectations grant from the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust in 2017 provided \$237,875 to Family Services in support of The Pre-K Priority’s efforts to begin the development and coordination of a comprehensive Pre-K strategy. An additional \$847,250 was provided to Family Services to coordinate a public awareness and engagement campaign during 2019-2020 along with a feasibility study to be completed in December 2019.

THE PATH FORWARD

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What are the biggest challenges or hurdles to this initiative?

Seeing long term benefits of Pre-K: The most immediate challenge is communicating the long-term benefits of Pre-K education to the broader public. While most people understand Pre-K’s short-term benefits—like Kindergarten success, positive socialization, and improved 3rd-grade reading scores— most people overlook the long-term benefits that impact the entire community.

Securing teachers: On the whole, compensation levels are significantly low in relation to the education level and training required of Pre-K teachers. That makes it hard to recruit and retain qualified teachers, and it’s one reason why we currently have a shortage of Pre-K teachers in Forsyth County.

The Pre-K Priority is exploring ways to 1) compensate current, qualified Pre-K teachers more in line with public school teachers’ salaries and 2) create financial incentives for individuals to pursue higher education; including students who want to become a Pre-K teacher and current teachers who want to obtain higher ECE credentials.



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When is this system of expanded, high-quality Pre-K expected to be in place? What are the next steps?

Adding new providers/classrooms and bringing existing, licensed facilities to high-quality standards raises critical questions about the means, cost, and timeline. A feasibility study being conducted by Forsyth Futures (forsythfutures.org) is gathering input from childcare providers in the Pre-K market, current teachers, and parents of young children. The study, to be completed in January 2020, will provide a basis for making informed, targeted investments in expanding high-quality Pre-K capacity – including implementation, logistics, and timing.

In the meantime, the support of citizens, parents, elected officials, business leaders, faith communities, and local activists is needed to further advocate and enact the next steps to realize the vision. The public education and engagement campaign offers opportunities for participation and involvement and has provided tools (online at PreKPriority.org) to help spread the word about the benefits of Pre-K for our children, families, and community.

