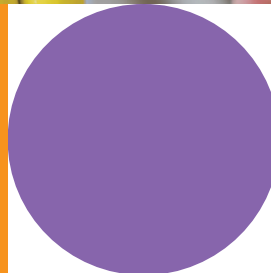
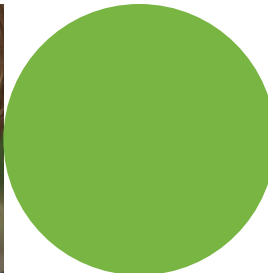
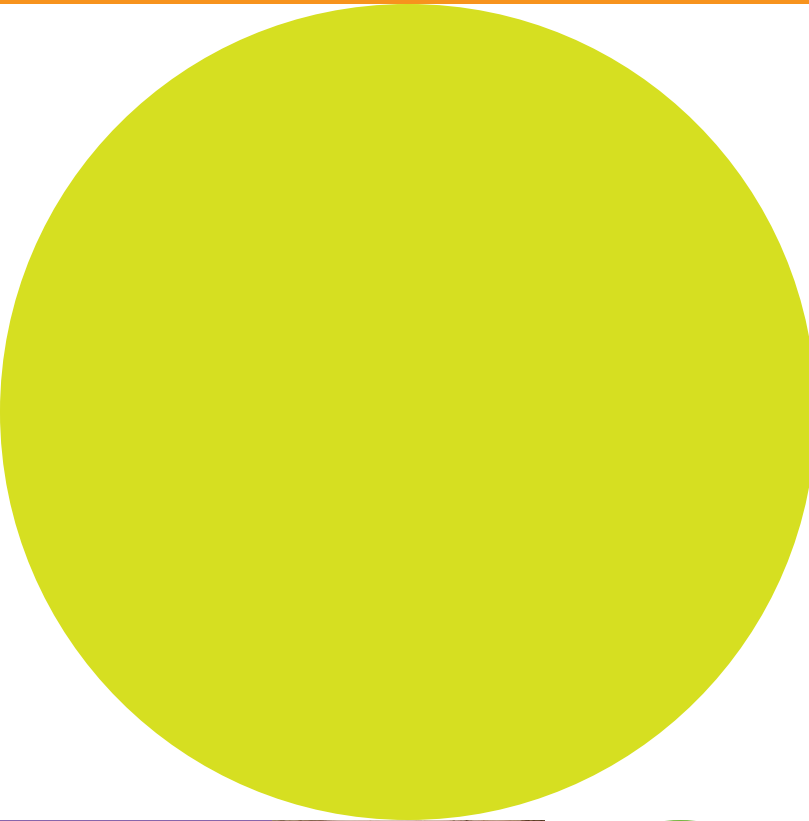


Building the Foundation for the Future of Forsyth County

THE PRE•K PRIORITY

Findings and Recommendations



ALL CHILDREN IN FORSYTH COUNTY DESERVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO ENTER SCHOOL READY TO LEARN.
IT'S TIME TO MAKE HIGH QUALITY PRE-K EDUCATION A TOP PRIORITY IN OUR COMMUNITY

Education has long been the door to opportunity and the pathway to prosperity in America. “The American Century” was made possible by the establishment of the universal public high school, which began around 1910. At that time only 9% of Americans had a high school diploma; by 1940, the number had increased to 50%. Other innovations have followed. In 1981, North Carolina became the first state to require kindergarten to be offered to all children. Winston-Salem can claim honors as the site of the nation’s first public arts conservatory with the opening of the University of North Carolina School of the Arts in 1963. And high school students today are earning college credits before graduation through advance placement and dual enrollment.

Despite these innovations, achieving the American Dream has become a remote possibility for too many, especially for younger generations. An “opportunity gap” has opened up, as documented by Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam in his book, *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*. Putnam found that:

...over the last 30-40 years, there is a growing gap for the opportunities and resources between those kids coming from affluent and well-educated homes, and ... for those kids coming from poor, less-educated homes. The point of my work is to say, “Here’s the reality.” Now, how do we go about changing our current reality to move us back more towards the reality of the American Dream?

The opportunity gap is widest in Forsyth County. A 2017 study by two Harvard economists found Forsyth County to be among the worst counties in the United States for helping poor children move up the income ladder. We rank 5th worst out of 2,873 counties nationwide. Only four American Indian reservations are below us.

Fortunately, there are proven ways to close the opportunity gap, most notably during the earliest years of life. Brain science has confirmed what most parents already know, namely, that the first five years of life are a time of tremendous physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development. These are the years when brain architecture is being built, with more than 1 million new neural connections formed every second. But just as seeds must be planted in fertile soil in order to grow, a child’s environment and life experiences shape and change the architecture of the developing brain, laying the foundation for all the development and behavior that follows, including how healthy and successful the child will be as an adult.

A recent Duke University study of more than one million North Carolina public school children found significant benefits from the state-funded Smart Start and More at Four (now NC Pre-K) programs. These early childhood programs:

...continued to have positive effects on the population of targeted students...as they progressed through middle school. Higher levels of program funding improved students’ math and reading scores, decreased the likelihood that they would be placed in special education, and reduced the probability of repeating a grade. The More at Four program effects varied significantly across subgroups within the population, with larger positive impacts on children from less well-educated, more economically disadvantaged, and African American families.

Other studies have documented how the gains made by children enrolled in high-quality early education programs translate into improved outcomes as adults in terms of post-secondary educational attainment, increased income, home ownership, improved health status, and less contact with the criminal justice system.

The findings and recommendations in this report provide a blueprint for building a Pre-K system that will benefit children, families, and our community for generations to come. The time has come for Forsyth County to take this step on behalf of its youngest children – our future workers, parents, citizens, and leaders. If not now, when?

All children in Forsyth County deserve the opportunity to succeed in school and in life. High-quality Pre-K programs help children enter kindergarten ready to achieve socially, emotionally, and academically. Extensive scientific research and economic analysis over the past forty years have shown high-quality Pre-K programs to be wise investments that close educational achievement gaps and improve health and well-being far into adulthood.

The first five years of life are critical for the construction of the physical architecture of the developing brain. Because brains are built in stages, with more complex structures built on simpler structures, it's crucial to get the early years right. Think of building a house: before framing the walls, a foundation has to be poured. Before wiring the house, walls and floors need to be built. Our brains are also built in sequence, and early childhood is about laying a solid foundation to serve as a base for later development. But children can't build strong brains by themselves—they need positive, nurturing relationships with trusted caregivers to support their development. High-quality Pre-K programs provide an enriching environment that stimulates brain development, promotes learning, and fosters the social-emotional stability that is a prerequisite for success in school and later life.

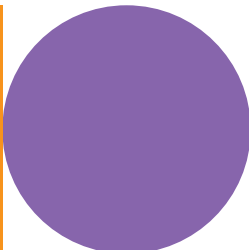
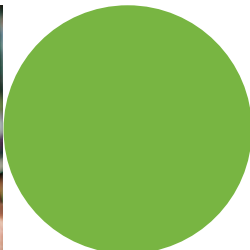
Forsyth County is poised to provide affordable options that will allow all families the opportunity to enroll their four-year-old children in a high-quality Pre-K program. To offer options responsive to the needs and preferences of families, our current Pre-K system will require improvements in quality, added capacity, the alignment of program models, and the establishment of a central administrative structure to ensure uniform practices. The time is right. Discussions of Pre-K expansion are taking place among elected officials, within the business community, and in the general public. The value of investments in early childhood development has been championed by the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust's Great Expectations initiative and highlighted by corporate support for Pre-K expansion through Project Impact.

This report documents the benefits of high-quality Pre-K programs, delineates the components of an affordable, high-quality system, and offers recommendations for how to make such programs available to all four-year-old children in Forsyth County. The report is the culmination of four and a half years of intensive work by the members of The Pre-K Priority. This alliance of nearly sixty individuals representing early childhood education (ECE) organizations, public agencies, philanthropic partners, and parents has diligently identified and thoroughly explored the essential elements and best practices associated with high-quality Pre-K programs and Pre-K system expansion. **Drawn together by the common vision of a community in which all children have the opportunity to attend a high-quality Pre-K program,** the expertise and experience of the members of The Pre-K Priority have been channeled into six work groups and guided and reviewed by a fifteen-member steering committee to produce the findings and recommendations in the full report, *Building the Foundation for the Future of Forsyth County*.

This report builds on the standards and practices of existing quality programs funded by the North Carolina Pre-K Program (NC Pre-K Program) and delivered by the Winston-Salem Forsyth County Schools (WS/FCS), Family Services Head Start program, and private community childcare providers. **These evidence-based and extensively evaluated programs incorporate curricula and practices that address the whole child (physical, social, emotional, and cognitive)** while recognizing and involving the family as a child's first and most important teacher. The report recommends additional features requisite for a high-quality Pre-K system that will produce the greatest return on investment, i.e., intensive family engagement, equitable teacher compensation practices, and outstanding workforce training and development programs.

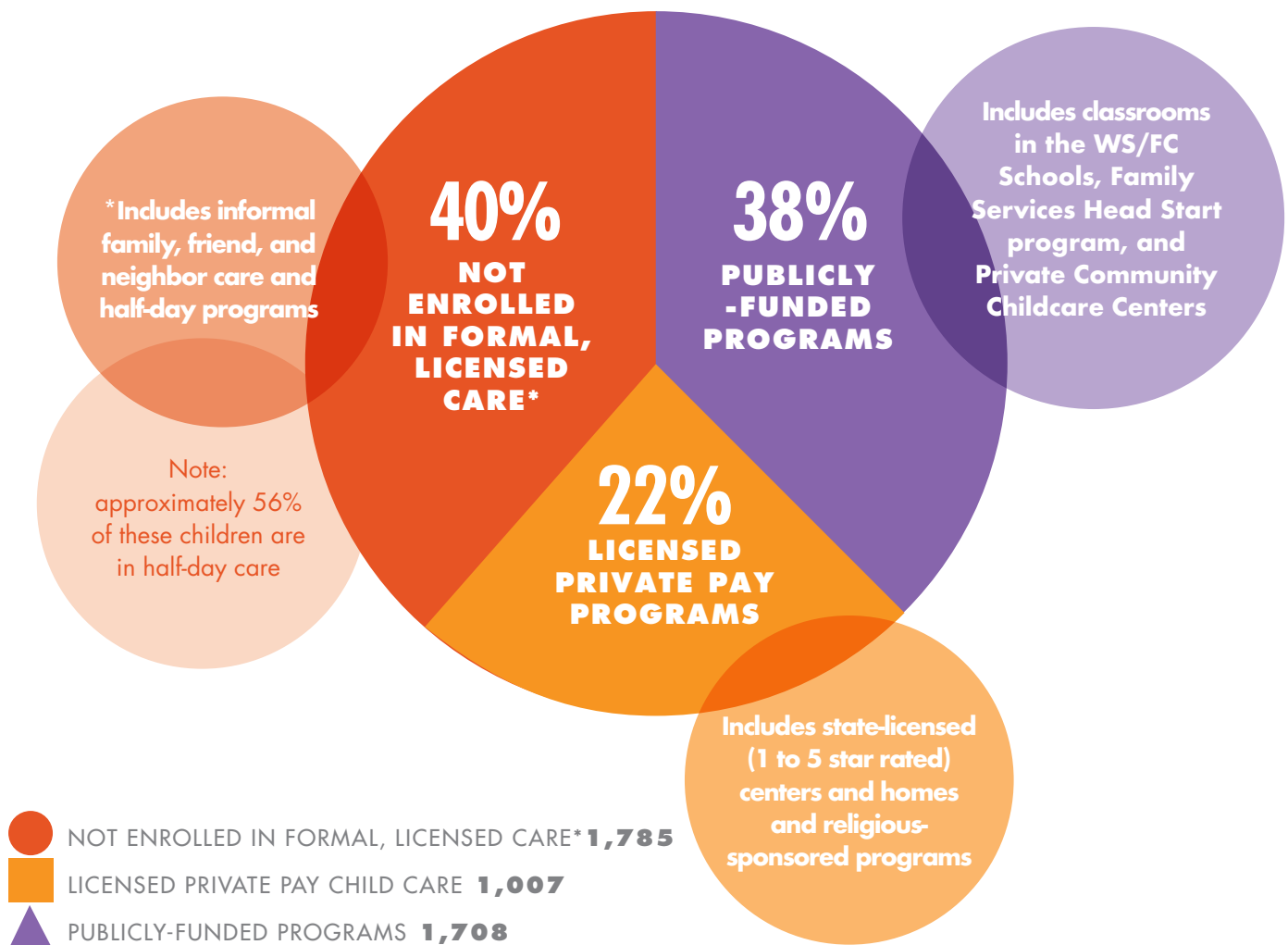
Quality Pre-K Education includes the following elements:

- Well-implemented, comprehensive early learning standards that include social and emotional aspects within an evidence-based and state-approved curriculum that address the whole child
 - ✓ Differences in language, ability, and culture are respected and supported with appropriate practices to help children thrive
- Lead Teachers have a bachelor degree and specialized training in a Pre-K area
Assistant Teachers hold an associate degree or Child Development Associate Credential™ (CDA)
 - ✓ All teachers receive in-service training and professional development (minimum 15 hours per year) and have ongoing coaching and mentoring
 - ✓ All credentialed and licensed teachers are compensated within an equitable system regardless of program location
- Ongoing Assessments and Evaluations Conducted for Children, Teachers, Program, and Program Setting
 - ✓ Children receive screenings, referral and support services for vision, hearing, dental, as well as, physical and mental health
 - ✓ Established systems hold individual classrooms accountable and monitor to ensure quality standards are being met
 - ✓ Ongoing monitoring of sites to confirm adherence to program standards
- Classroom Setting and Overall Environment
 - ✓ Sites have a 4- or 5-Star Quality Rating based on NC State Licensing Standards
 - ✓ Maximum class size is 20 or fewer
 - ✓ Staff to child ratio is 1:10 or less
 - ✓ Minimum of 6.5-hour day of instruction for children
 - ✓ Children are provided at least one nutritious meal per day
- Parent and family engagement are incorporated in meaningful ways to support the child's growth and family vitality, while respecting and honoring cultural aspects and learning differences



Forsyth County can build on the solid foundation of established Pre-K programs in both the public school system and the community, including private child care centers and Family Services' Head Start program. Currently, this mixed system of public and private providers affords families options for service locations, schedules, and programming that help meet their varied needs and preferences. The chart below is a point in time depiction of the various care arrangements for Forsyth County's four-year-old children.

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



In effect, over 80% of four-year-olds are currently in some type of out-of-home child care, although more than a fourth of those are in half-day, unlicensed programs. There are significant variations across and within these categories in regard to meeting the standards for high-quality programs developed by The Pre-K Priority. An expanded Pre-K system aims to ensure that all four-year-old children have access to affordable programs that uniformly meet high-quality standards. Achieving this goal will involve a combination of adding to current capacity and improving the quality of existing programs.

A commitment to high-quality standards is required to positively impact the children, families, and educators that participate in an expanded Pre-K system and maximize return on investment. The following recommendations – drawn from the more extensive list included in the full report – provide an overview of Forsyth County’s current Pre-K landscape and the steps that need to be taken to ensure that all our children have the opportunity to succeed.

QUALITY

Programs that aspire to the highest level of quality address the following elements: staff credentials and professional supports; program curriculum and associated teaching tools; child assessments and screenings; classroom setting and environment; program evaluation and ongoing monitoring; transition practices into and out of Pre-K; and family support and well-being.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Establish standardized education credentials and qualifications for lead teacher, assistant teacher, and director/administrator positions with robust professional development opportunities and ongoing supports.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Utilize North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education curricula and associated teaching tools in Pre-K classrooms to deliver a high-quality experience that addresses the whole child, with special attention to social-emotional development. Special consideration is given to employing teaching strategies, materials, and supports that address the needs of dual language learners and children with special needs.

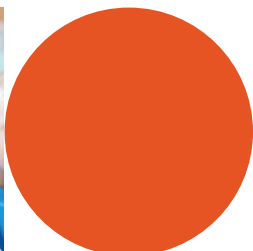
RECOMMENDATION 3: Prioritize fidelity in the implementation and delivery of the curriculum, assessments, and screenings in order to achieve the anticipated outcomes. The use of standardized and state-approved instruments are required to achieve and maintain uniformity in teaching methods, delivery, and materials regardless of the location of the Pre-K program to ensure that all children have comparable learning experiences.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Accomplish successful transitions for children and families through structured programming that provides stable and well-connected supports preceding and during entrance into Pre-K and in the progression from Pre-K into kindergarten.

RECOMMENDATION 5: Apply practical and evidence-based family engagement practices that empower parents and families to participate in their child’s learning experience and provide parents with access to community resources that can increase family well-being. Assign family support specialists to each classroom to facilitate family engagement.

TEACHER COMPENSATION

RECOMMENDATION 6: Implement compensation practices that attract qualified staff and ensure uniform quality across an expanded Pre-K system. A Base Salary Scale and Supplement Program should be instituted for qualified Lead Pre-K teachers to provide a livable income at parity with public school teachers’ salaries. Such a program will reduce retention issues and increase interest among high school and college students in pursuing early childhood education (ECE) workforce careers.



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT & TRAINING

RECOMMENDATION 7: Create a central website/portal related to standards and career advancement opportunities for teachers in the Birth through Kindergarten (BK) profession. Provide information to encourage high schoolers, college students, and early childhood professionals to pursue/advance an ECE career. Include: guidelines for high-quality training; a checklist of teacher and administrator standards required for licensure; career pathways and existing pipelines for the emerging workforce; ECE and institutional partnerships in our region; and prerequisites for various BK job positions.

RECOMMENDATION 8: In collaboration with the WS/FCS' Career Technical Education program, introduce ECE learning pathways and career track options for middle and high school students. Use the expertise and networks of Career Development Coordinators (CDC) at each high school to assign a mentor/advocate to each ECE student. Establish and/or strengthen partnerships among local educational institutions by bridging high school-based learning with institutions of higher learning that offer BK-focused credentialing and degrees.

RECOMMENDATION 9: Decrease barriers for individuals pursuing ECE professional credentials by strengthening incentives for both teachers and administrative personnel. In doing so, assess the usage of existing incentive-based programs that promote higher education attainment and develop a framework that includes flexibility and ongoing retention efforts, with greater attention to support individuals with low-incomes. Additionally, create a salary-based incentive bonus for dual language educators to become licensed teachers in both languages.

RECOMMENDATION 10: Implement professional development and dedicated teacher supports to motivate ECE professionals to remain in the field. Enhancements to the current 15 hours of professional development include job mentoring, one-to-one coaching, and individualized professional development plans.

PUBLIC EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT

RECOMMENDATION 11: Conduct a public education and engagement campaign to increase understanding among the general public of the importance of providing all children in Forsyth County with the opportunity to attend a high-quality Pre-K program. Support the development of citizen-led efforts to advocate on behalf of Pre-K expansion with civic leaders and elected officials.

RECOMMENDATION 12: Engage civic and business leaders and elected officials in understanding, advocating for, and adopting policies supporting the expansion of high-quality Pre-K programs.

RECOMMENDATION 13: Involve parents in advocating for Pre-K expansion to ensure that their voices and choices regarding their children's Pre-K experience are included in planning and implementing the Pre-K system.



INCREASE THE NUMBER OF HIGH-QUALITY CLASSROOMS

RECOMMENDATION 14: Utilizing the results of the feasibility study being conducted by Forsyth Futures in 2019, assess the demand (number and location of four-year-old children; childcare preference of families) and supply (capacity and quality of existing childcare providers; availability of qualified teachers) of current Pre-K options. Devise a plan to incrementally expand the capacity of the Pre-K system to meet demand. An approach that spans a period of years will allow for the growth of a uniform system that encompasses a mix of existing and new public and private providers, while corresponding to an increase in the number of qualified teachers.

SYSTEM IMPLEMENTATION AND ADMINISTRATION

RECOMMENDATION 15: Determine the appropriate administrative model and entity responsible for administering and managing the expanded Pre-K system. Assess various models utilized by expanded Pre-K programs across the country, and particularly models adopted by peer cities with a population, demographics, and socio-economic features similar to Forsyth County.

PROJECT EVALUATION OF THE EXPANDED SYSTEM

RECOMMENDATION 16: Develop a project evaluation plan that identifies relevant evaluative methodologies and evidence-based metrics/outcomes; creates guidelines for how and when to conduct monitoring and evaluation activities; and establishes criteria for selecting the evaluator.

FUNDING

RECOMMENDATION 17: Perform an analysis of the current cost of publicly-funded Pre-K programs operated by the WS/FCS, Head Start, and private community childcare centers; the cost of other licensed Pre-K programs; the cost of bringing all existing full-day Pre-K programs up to the quality standards established by The Pre-K Priority; and the cost of the additional program capacity required to meet demand in a high-quality Pre-K system.

RECOMMENDATION 18: Develop a timeline for the incremental expansion of high-quality Pre-K programs in Forsyth County that takes into account the scope and costs of the system and the optimal combination of revenues from public sources (local, state, and federal) and private payments needed to fund the system.

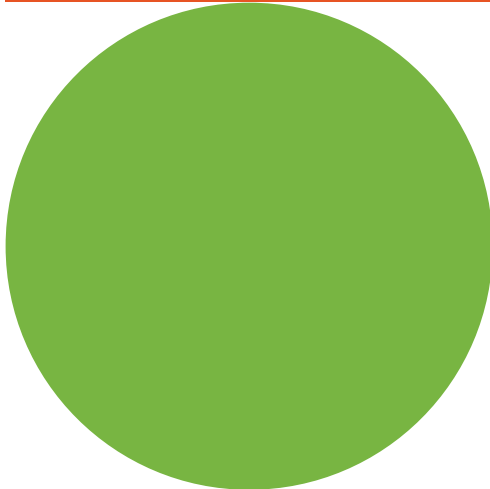
CIVIC LEADERSHIP

RECOMMENDATION 19: Form a Community Advisory Council comprised of representatives from the broad range of organizations and individuals involved in developing, funding, providing, and/or benefiting from an expanded system of high-quality Pre-K programs in Forsyth County, including elected officials and leaders from business, government, faith-based organizations, philanthropy, education, healthcare, and community-based organizations along with parents and interested citizens. The Council will provide guidance in the continuing development of the Pre-K system in Forsyth County and make recommendations regarding the quality, funding, implementation, management, administration, and evaluation of an expanded Pre-K system in Forsyth County.

This report establishes the foundation upon which an expanded Pre-K system can be created in Forsyth County. It builds on the outstanding legacy of innovation and investment in early childhood education that has characterized North Carolina's longstanding national leadership in the field.

But for all that has been accomplished over the past four and a half years, much more remains to be done. The implementation of the recommendations presented here – and in greater detail in the [full report](#) – will require the continued efforts of the ECE professionals that have contributed to this report, joined by leaders from all sectors of the community, parents, and members of the general public.

Forsyth County is paying a steep price by not making sufficient investments in early education programs. The impact on the productivity and livability of our community will be extensive and enduring unless we alter the course. The encouraging news is that our community can change this outcome. The Duke University study has documented the near term benefits of high-quality Pre-K programs in relation to academic performance. But it is in the long run, as today's children become tomorrow's adults that the return on investment in early education comes to fruition in the form of a healthier and more vibrant community.



STEERING COMMITTEE (2014-2019)

CLAUDIA BARRETT, Executive Director, Imprints Cares

KELLY BENDHEIM, Coordinator for Early Learning, Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools

MATT BRITT, Chair, Smart Start of Forsyth County; Co-Chair, North Carolina Pre-K Program Committee

NIKKI BYERS, Executive Director, Imprints Cares

ALICIA COOK, Public Ally, North Carolina Justice Center

JOE CROCKER, Director of Local Impact in Forsyth County, Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust

MARNI EISNER, Director, Great Expectations, MDC

MATT ELLINWOOD, Director of Education and Law Project, North Carolina Justice Center

VICTORIA FULTON, Manager of Project Impact, Project Impact & Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools

BOB FEIKEMA, President & CEO, Family Services (Convener)

SHAREE FOWLER, Director, Arts Management and Not-for-Profit Management Programs and Assistant Professor of Not-for-Profit Management, Salem College

KATURA JACKSON, Executive Director, Child Care Resource Center

TANYA MCDUGAL, Director of Strategic Initiatives, Forsyth County Department of Social Services

SARAH MONTGOMERY, Policy Advocate, Education and Law Project, North Carolina Justice Center

LESLIE MULLINIX, Universal Pre-K Initiative Project Coordinator, Family Services

AMY NAIL, Instructional Superintendent, Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools

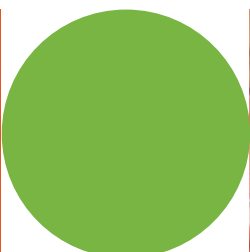
EVA PHILLIPS, Ready Schools Program Manager, Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools

WENDY POTEAT, Executive Director, The Forsyth Promise

LARRY VELLANI, Executive Director, Smart Start of Forsyth County

ELIZABETH WHITE, Deputy Director, Forsyth County Department of Social Services

JENNY WHITLEY, Chief Educational Officer/Director of Teaching & Learning Services, Smart Start of Forsyth County



WORK GROUPS

I. TEACHER COMPENSATION WORK GROUP

Nikki Byers (Convener), Imprints Care
Bob Feikema, Family Services
Katura Jackson, Child Care Resource Center
Charlette Lindell, Smart Start of Forsyth County
Leslie Mullinix, Family Services
Doug Punger, North Carolina Pre-K Committee
Vanessa Sawyer-Wilson, Smart Start of Forsyth County
Vivien Stearns, Family Services
Theresa Stephens, Church Child Care Center
Jenny Whitley, Smart Start of Forsyth County

II. FUNDING WORK GROUP

Deborah Forrest, Bethlehem Community Child Care Center
Shana Heilbron, Center for Exceptional Children
 and The Special Children's School
Katura Jackson, Child Care Resource Center
Wendy Poteat, The Forsyth Promise
Larry Vellani (Convener), Smart Start of Forsyth County
Jenny Whitley, Smart Start of Forsyth County

**III. PUBLIC POLICY AND CIVIC
LEADERSHIP WORK GROUP**

Gayle Anderson, Winston-Salem Chamber of Commerce
Joe Crocker, Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust
Marni Eisner, Great Expectations, MDC
Matt Ellinwood, North Carolina Justice Center
Bob Feikema (Convener), Family Services
Michael Lawless, North Carolina Pre-K Committee
Amy Nail, Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools
Doug Punger, North Carolina Pre-K Committee

IV. PARENT ADVOCACY WORK GROUP

Alicia Cook (Co-Convener), North Carolina Justice Center
Sharon Frazier, Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools
Victoria Fulton, Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools
 & Project Impact
Andrea Hulighan, Winston-Salem Foundation
Micha James, Leadership Winston-Salem
Tanya McDougal, Forsyth County Department
 of Social Services
Sarah Montgomery, (Co-Convener),
 North Carolina Justice Center
Trina Stephens, Imprints Cares
Shirelle Stewart-Riddick, Forsyth County Department
 of Social Services
Shonna Trinidad, Family Services

V. QUALITY WORK GROUP

Shanina Doe, Family Services
Sharon Frazier, Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools
Katisha Fonville, Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools
Victoria Fulton, Winston-Salem/Forsyth County
 Schools & Project Impact
Christine Harrold, Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools
Kabria Hines, Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools
Joy Johnson, Family Services
Katie McGregor, Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools
Cara McKeown, Smart Start of Forsyth County
Jenean Moss, Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools
Lisa O'Brien, Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools
Linda Olinger, Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools
Eva Phillips (Convener), Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools
Laura Rodriguez, Winston-Salem/ Forsyth County Schools
Jenny Whitley, Smart Start of Forsyth County

**VI. WORKFORCE EDUCATION &
TRAINING WORK GROUP**

Brandi Covington, Family Services
Beth Day-Hairston, Winston-Salem State University
Sharee Fowler (Convener), Salem College
Sabrina Hinton, Salem College
Shawn Martin, Centers for Exceptional
 Children and The Special Children's School
Rodessa Mitchell, Winston-Salem Chamber of Commerce
Leslie Mullinix, Family Services
Vanessa Sawyer-Wilson, Smart Start of Forsyth County
Okeyma Wright, Child Care Network
Phygenia Young, Forsyth Technical Community College

**Building the Foundation for the
future of Forsyth County**

THE
PRE•K
PRIORITY

**Quality Early Education for
Every 4-Year-Old in Forsyth County**

prekpriority.org



THE PRE-K PRIORITY is a coalition of community organizations convened by Family Services.

All inquiries should be directed to
Leslie Mullinix, Pre-K Priority Project Coordinator
at 336.722.8173

lmullinix@familyservicesforsyth.org,
1200 South Broad Street
Winston-Salem, NC 27101



A Community of Solutions