

WHY SHOULD YOU CARE ABOUT EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION?

The future of any society depends on its ability to foster the health and well-being of the next generation. North Carolina's prosperity depends on our ability to ensure that all children have the opportunity to develop

intellectually, socially, and emotionally. A child with a solid foundation grows into a responsible and productive citizen. How do we ensure a solid foundation? We begin with high-quality early care and education.

What is Smart Start?

Created by the North Carolina General Assembly in 1993 Smart Start is the state's early childhood infrastructure. Smart Start's 77 local partnerships serving all 100 North Carolina counties provide the network on the ground that is needed to

produce efficient and effective results for children birth to five. Local partnerships serve as a system to convene stakeholders to assess local needs; ensure accountability; and leverage private, community, state and federal resources.

Why Smart Start?

Neuroscience has changed how we think of the earliest years. Images of the brain show that the experiences children have early in life literally shape the wiring of the brain and strongly affect whether a child grows up to be a healthy, productive member of society.

The social, educational, and economic benefits of quality early education are so clear that the U.S. Chamber of Commerce released a 2010 report saying, "Early childhood education has a tremendous impact on the national economic security and the viability of the American dream."



Smart Start works.

Between 1993 and 2003, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill evaluated Smart Start's performance. Among their findings:

- Child care quality has increased since Smart Start began.
- Smart Start-funded activities were positively related to classroom quality.
- Quality was positively related to children's outcomes.

Since June 2001, Smart Start has used independent data from state and federal sources to understand how North Carolina's children are faring. Smart Start reports on child well-being in each county across the state as part of Smart

Start's annual performance-based evaluation system. This snapshot identifies in which areas children are doing well and in which areas attention is needed. Since beginning this annual evaluation, children have fared better each year. For example:

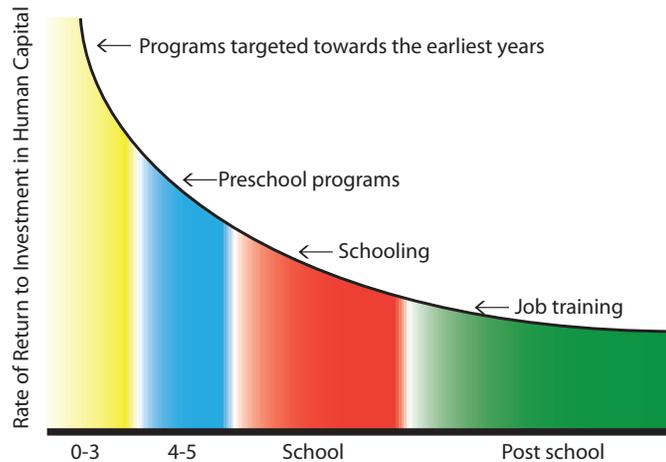
- 63% of all children in early care and education attended high quality (4- and 5-star) programs in 2009 as compared to 33% in 2001.
- 74% of children whose families received help paying for early childhood care and education attended high quality (4- and 5-star) centers in 2009 as compared to 30% in 2001.

Smart Start is efficient.

- Ninety-two cents of every Smart Start dollar goes directly to ensuring that children and families have the experiences they need to thrive.
- Federal and private funders have invested millions of dollars in North Carolina's early childhood system because Smart Start provides the local network on the ground

that is needed to produce efficient and effective results.

- The power of Smart Start is in its public/private partnership that mandates outcomes, while giving communities local control to determine the best approach to achieving them.



Rate of Return to Investment in Human Capital

North Carolinians support early childhood investments.

- During the height of the recession in 2009 and 2010, more than 800 parents, business leaders, elected officials, health care providers, early childhood professionals and others representing every county in the state came together and agreed that ensuring access to high-quality early care and education programs needed to be a top priority for the state.

- A recent poll by Public Policy Polling that found the majority of North Carolina voters do not support cuts to early childhood funding. Most notably, independent voters are particularly opposed to early childhood cuts with 59% say funding should not be reduced.



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