

Buncombe County Subsidized Child Care Program

Early Childhood Education Issues of Critical Importance

January 22, 2018 – Planning Session with the Buncombe County Commissioners

The Buncombe County Subsidized Child Care Program is managed by the Buncombe County Department of Health and Human Services. Approximately 2000 children are served at any one time by this program. The program contracts with local child care facilities who meet licensure requirements from the NC Division of Child Development and Early Education. Approximately 80 - 85 local providers and some out of county providers participate in this program, serving children ages birth – 12 years of age. Local providers serve subsidy eligible children in varying numbers, from a high of 90 children to one child. Parents have their eligibility determined by the local Department of Social Services and receive a voucher for their child's care. Parents pay a co-pay based on family income and other family factors and these family co-pays range from \$.00 to \$410.00. The huge majority of families who use the subsidized child care program are low-income working families with 88% of the children served in this category. Other children served by the subsidized child care program are; education and training- 5%, child protective services or child welfare services – 4%, children with developmental needs – 1% and all other 2%.

The Buncombe County Subsidized Child Care Program supports the work done by the Asheville-Buncombe Preschool Planning Collaborative.

We support the report, *The Key to Our Futures: Expanding Access to High-Quality Preschool in Asheville and Buncombe County*.

The Buncombe County Subsidized Child Care Program recognizes several critical issues that are important for future positive development of subsidized child care in Buncombe County. Two of these issues are specific to the Buncombe County Subsidized Child Care Program.

Funding Issues – The NC Subsidized Child Care Program has two main funding problems – (1) allocations and (2) reimbursement rates.

1. Allocations – The NC Subsidized Child Care Program has a funding level of about \$400 Million annually. These funds are a mix of Federal Child Care Development Funds, Smart Start Funds, and other Social Services Block Grant Funds. Total funds are awarded to the 100 local counties in NC based on an allocation formula which factors in poverty rates, working single parent families and total county population. Even with this large amount of funding, in NC the waiting list for subsidized child care averages 35,000 to 40,000 children. These numbers are collected and revised monthly. Buncombe County is a fairly typical county in that there are times when the waiting list is low and times when it is very high. Our request to our Public Policy Makers is to advocate for additional funding so that no eligible child is placed on a waiting list.
2. Reimbursement Rates – The NC Subsidized Child Care Program reimburses providers for the child care that they provide, based on a County Market Rate number. This number is developed by surveying providers to determine the cost that they charge to parents for child care. Over the years, in NC this system has

become heavily weighted in favor of NC largest counties, such as Mecklenburg and Wake. Currently, Buncombe County Early Childhood Education leaders have been working on State-wide committees to support a more equitable system for this reimbursement system. Our request to our Public Policy Makers is to advocate for an “alternative methodology” for determining the reimbursement rate to local providers.

As the Buncombe County Subsidized Child Care Program plans and moves toward better access and higher quality with our colleagues in the Early Childhood Education community, we share a desperate need for workforce issues. Embracing all of the issues including teacher compensation, qualified teacher availability and a workforce for local child care providers that will enable us to meet the demand for high quality educational environments for our youngest children. We, further support expansion of program availability so that parents will have options for their needs and all young children who desire preschool experiences will have the opportunity to enroll and attend high quality programs.