



BUNCOMBE COUNTY STRATEGIC PRIORITY:

## EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION



**PRIORITY:** Ensure that every child in Buncombe County has an equal opportunity to thrive during their first 2,000 days including access to quality early childhood education.

**BACKGROUND:** The period in a child's life from birth to kindergarten is approximately 2,000 days, and that formative time is critical for development for lifelong health and success. Studies show that high-quality early development experiences position children to enter school ready to succeed, graduate from high school and grow into thriving adults. In particular, high-quality pre-k programs are proven to provide measurable short- and long-term results for children and their peers, families and communities. Yet access to early childhood education is limited based on availability and affordability. Programs typically have long wait lists, and it is difficult for providers to cover the costs of high-quality care and difficult for families to afford it. At-risk families face additional barriers such as low income, educational attainment, complex behavioral and health care needs, individual/family/community trauma and fragmented support systems. Funding early childhood education is a complex and fragile mix of federal, state and local government funding, philanthropy and fees. In addition, there is a shortage of highly trained and qualified teachers and staff.

### GOALS:

- Collaborate with community leaders and stakeholders for a coordinated system approach.
- Increase the availability of high quality early childhood care and education with an emphasis on pre-k programs.
- Address issues of affordability, both for providers in a sustainable business model and for families in access to care.
- Support a robust career track in the field of early education, with development ladders from entry level to highly educated, credentialed, seasoned professionals.
- Cultivate a system that responds to the needs of families, such as those impacted by trauma, poverty and addiction.

