

Supporting the Financial Recovery of Verner's Families and the Workforce Behind the Workforce

*RFP for Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal
Recovery Funds*

Verner Center for Early Learning

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Application Form

Question Group

Buncombe County requests proposals for projects to help the community recover from and respond to COVID-19 and its negative economic impacts.

Buncombe County has been awarded \$50,733,290 in Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (Recovery Funding), as part of the American Rescue Plan Act. To date, Buncombe County has awarded projects totaling \$23,093,499, leaving a balance of \$27,639,791 available to award.

Visit <http://www.buncombecounty.org/recoveryfunding><http://www.buncombecounty.org/recoveryfunding><http://www.buncombecounty.org/recoveryfunding><http://www.buncombecounty.org/recoveryfunding><http://www.buncombecounty.org/recoveryfunding> for details.

This infusion of federal resources is intended to help turn the tide on the pandemic, address its economic fallout, and lay the foundation for a strong and equitable recovery.

Buncombe County is committed to investing these funds in projects that:

- Align to county strategic plan and community priorities
- Support equitable outcomes for most impacted populations
- Leverage and align with other governmental funding sources
- Make best use of this one-time infusion of resources
- Have a lasting impact

Proposals shall be submitted in accordance with the terms and conditions of this RFP and any addenda issued hereto.

[Click here for the full terms and conditions of the RFP](#)

Organization Type*

Nonprofit

Nonprofit documentation

If nonprofit, attach IRS Determination Letter or other proof of nonprofit status.

[IRS Verner name change affirmation of 501c3 status.pdf](#)

Name of Project.*

Supporting the Financial Recovery of Verner's Families and the Workforce Behind the Workforce

New/Updated Proposal*

Is this a new project proposal or an updated version of a proposal submitted during the earlier (July 2021) Recovery Funding RFP?

New project proposal

Amount of Funds Requested*

\$465,739.82

Category*

Please select one:

- Affordable Housing
- Aging/Older Adults
- Business Support/Economic Development
- Environmental/Climate
- Homelessness
- K-12 Education
- Infrastructure and/or Broadband
- Mental Health/Substance Use
- NC Pre-K Expansion
- Workforce

Workforce

Brief Project Description*

Provide a short summary of your proposed project.

Verner requests \$465,739.82 to support workforce development and retention activities. The funds requested will allow Verner to retain qualified teachers, recruit additional qualified teachers, and support families' ability to participate in the workforce. Funds will also be used to create a new Social Emotional Development Coordinator position, to support classroom faculty, children, and families who are dealing with increased mental health challenges as a result of the ongoing pandemic. Additionally, funds will support increased salaries for Assistant Teachers, to increase recruitment and retention, and cover the salaries of additional Assistant Teachers to make sure all classrooms and educators have the staff support they need to provide high-quality care during a time of continued high stress. Funds will also cover retention bonuses for staff and faculty who have remained at Verner during this challenging time.

Project Plan*

Explain how the project will be structured and implemented, including timeframe.

During fiscal year 2022, Verner is grateful to have been the recipient of a Recovery Fund award to provide extended hours to our Early Head Start (EHS) families. A project implementation challenge is a staffing shortage that prevents us from being able to offer full-day care to all families. Only 4 out of 9 EHS classrooms have enough staff to offer additional hours. Without at least 3 teachers per classroom, we cannot offer full-day services to all families. Without funding to increase pay, we cannot recruit enough teachers to fully staff all of our classrooms. We have realized that the Support Teacher role, with a base pay of \$13.15 per hour, is no longer attracting any candidates. In response to this challenge, as soon as funding is awarded Verner will eliminate the Support Teacher role and replace it with additional Assistant Teachers, with a base pay of \$14.16 per hour. We do not have the ability in our operating budget to make such a pay rate increase. In addition to allowing us to hire Assistant Teachers in place of Support Teachers at a more attractive compensation rate, funds will support the salaries of up to 21 additional Assistant Teachers required to continue to provide high-quality early care and education. Verner's operating budget cannot support the number of faculty salaries needed to staff all of our classrooms for the full day. (Revenue from EHS and NC Pre-K is for services provided for only 6 and 6.5 hours per day, respectively – and the families benefiting from these programs are the furthest from opportunity and disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.) Because we know that full-day care is critical for families to be able to return to work, child and curriculum development staff who would normally work with classroom teachers to manage challenging behaviors, provide mental health and development services, and design curriculum are having to primarily serve as teachers in classrooms. Therefore, our educators do not have the support they need, and their mental health is significantly impacted. We will also implement a retention bonus plan to support staff and faculty members who have remained at Verner throughout the pandemic, or who were hired during it. Details of the bonus plan are in the attached budget. Finally, we will add a new Social Emotional Development Coordinator position to support children, families, and teachers all of whom are experiencing a significant increase in mental health needs. Specific to children in Early Head Start classrooms, we are seeing an increase in need for children that have spent most or all of their lives in the context of the pandemic. The addition of this position is critical for us to be able to continue to provide high-quality early learning environments in which all children are safe and can thrive. It will also contribute to the recruitment and retention of qualified teachers as they feel more supported and have the necessary resources to meet the needs of all of their students.

Statement of Need*

Describe the need that this project will address. Include data to demonstrate the need, and cite the source of the data.

There has long been a disconnect between what child care programs spend to provide quality care in a labor-intensive sector and what families of young children can afford to pay for those services. The pandemic has brought attention to the importance of a robust child care system and the market failure under which the system operates. As stated in the Increase Early Education Teacher Compensation Now fact sheet from the NC Early Education Coalition, published on March 31, 2021, "Parents can't afford to pay more. Child care programs can't afford to pay their teachers more. Early education teachers can't afford to stay for such low wages."

Early educators have been considered essential frontline workers throughout the pandemic, yet they are drastically underpaid. According to a 2021 report by the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment at the University of California, Berkeley, the poverty rate among early educators in NC is 17.6%, compared to 2.4% for K-8 educators. In Buncombe County, the living wage rate in 2022 is \$17.70 per hour. The most recent data available shows that, in 2019, the average child care teacher's pay rate was \$13.37 per hour. At Verner, our lowest teacher wage is \$13.15 and on average teachers make \$16.60. We cannot pay a living wage to all of our staff and faculty without additional investment.

According to a March 1, 2022 report produced by the Economics Group of Wells Fargo Bank, NA, employment in the child care services sector is still 12.4% below its pre-pandemic level, compared to a 1.9% deficit in overall employment. Data from the NC Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) shows that there were 1,025 employees working in 114 licensed child care centers and homes in Buncombe

County in September of 2019. In September of 2021, the number of employees had decreased to 862, with the number of facilities remaining the same. Clearly, these numbers are not sustainable to operate an early learning program of any quality.

Link to COVID-19*

Identify a health or economic harm resulting from or exacerbated by the public health emergency, describe the nature and extent of that harm, and explain how the use of this funding would address such harm.

The ongoing public health emergency has impacted Verner's children, families, and staff and faculty in many ways. Everyone's mental and physical health continues to be impacted by the constant state of uncertainty, ongoing trauma, current and/or past COVID-19 illness, disruptions to routines, and anxiety. Verner's staff and faculty are also continually stretched thin due to the ongoing staffing crisis impacting most, if not all, employers. Teachers are exhausted and stressed, and many are leaving the field altogether. At least three of Verner's educators have experienced homelessness in the last six months as the cost of living in Buncombe County continues to rise, at least in part due to the economic conditions caused by the pandemic.

Our community is faced with a confluence of pandemic-related challenges resulting in an increased need for high-quality early childhood education services, including social and emotional, behavioral, and mental health services delivered within the center and home-visitation model that Verner provides. Verner is seeing a decreasing number of qualified individuals in our community to support these urgent child development and family well-being needs.

Now more than ever, it is critical that we focus on relational health. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, "Relational health refers to the ability to develop and sustain safe, stable, and nurturing relationships with emotionally available, engaged and attuned adults. The adults provide children and adolescents with the positive experiences that buffer adversity and build the foundational social and emotional skills needed to be resilient in the face of adversity." Our overworked and underpaid early childhood educators are finding it more difficult to be "emotionally available, engaged, and attuned" for the children in their care. We must address our workforce challenges in order to give these professionals the support they need to effectively deliver high-quality care.

Population Served*

Define the population to be served by this project, including volume and demographic characteristics of those served.

The population served by this project will include Verner's faculty and staff, as well as our enrolled families. Verner currently employs 82 individuals, a number that will grow to more than 100 once our new Verner Central center is fully operational. Of the 145 children currently enrolled in center-based care at Verner, 12% identify as Black or African American, 63% identify as white, and 25% identify as something else or more than one race. Of our currently enrolled families, 11% identify as Hispanic and 8% list their primary language as Spanish. We anticipate that the demographic composition of our enrolled children and families will shift and become even more diverse as we move into the Emma community and enroll more center-based students who reside within the Asheville city limits.

Recently, we have seen increases in mental health challenges and substance use disorder among our enrolled families, many of whom come from overburdened and under-resourced communities that are disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. Regardless of the socioeconomic status of families, the dearth of early education slots is impacting a large swath of the workforce leaving low-wealth families with few options for child care. Verner teachers are the "workforce behind the workforce," offering high-quality early education to Buncombe County residents. Eighty percent of the families Verner serves face significant economic and other barriers. Unfortunately, like many organizations the ramifications of the pandemic has

yielded a dwindling pool of qualified applicants for Verner's teacher positions. This has been coupled with the rapidly increasing cost of living in Buncombe County over the last three years. According to Just Economics, the living wage in Buncombe County in 2022 is \$17.70 per hour. In 2019, it was \$13.65. Due to financial constraints, Verner is not able to meet the 2022 benchmark for all staff, but we are actively working towards it.

Results*

Describe the proposed impact of the project. List at least 3 performance measures that will be tracked and reported. If possible, include baselines and goals for each performance measure.

Performance Measures:

1. Staff turnover: We will strive for a staff turnover rate at or below 40% in fiscal year 2022-23. The turnover rate in FY2020-21 was 60%, and in FY 2021-22 to date it is 31.65%.
2. Staff tenure: Average length of tenure at Verner will increase from 72% employed (1) year or longer in FY 2020-21 and 76% in FY 2021-22 to 80% in FY 2022-23.
3. Number of employees: The number of employees will increase from 82 in April 2022 to 100 by August 2023.
4. Number of Verner caregivers in the workforce: The number of caregivers who are able to obtain employment or re-enter the workforce will increase. As a result of Verner's current Fiscal Recovery Fund grant award, we know that at least 29 families enrolled in Verner's EHS program have been able to access employment or work more hours because of having access to child care. We would measure the impact of this project in the same way, through our regular family needs assessment process and the ongoing communication between our family partnerships staff and our enrolled families.
5. Faculty and staff mental health and wellbeing: For tracking wellbeing and mental health, we are luckily well positioned to center the staff as the best guides for measuring their health. We will seek their input on a measure, and use pre and post sequenced measurements to gauge the validity of the changes created by the grant.

Evaluation*

Describe the data collection, analysis, and quality assurance measures you will use to assure ongoing, effective tracking of contract requirements and outcomes.

Verner has a robust data collection system already in place to track program activities and outcomes across all areas of our programming. We will utilize the existing structure for collecting and analyzing data related to the contract requirements for this program and to measure outcomes for this project as described above.

Our existing structure includes several data collection platforms: Abila MIP for accounting information, ChildPlus for child and family attendance, enrollment, and demographic data, Parent Gauge for family needs assessment and program evaluation data, ADP for employee data, and the Ages and Stages Questionnaire and Kaymbu for child assessment and learning outcomes data. Data and information are inputted into each of these platforms by the appropriate staff and analyzed on a regular basis as part of Verner's ongoing monitoring and continuous quality improvement systems.

Equity Impact*

How will this effort help build toward a just, equitable, and sustainable COVID-19 recovery? How are the root causes and/or disproportionate impacts of inequities addressed?

One result of the pandemic is that it has shed light on the complexity of workforce system issues, and workers' choices and needs, and also illuminated the compounded effects of inequitable systemic privilege and power. Early education programs, like Verner, serving income-eligible families in publicly funded programs are disproportionately centered at the crux of these systems. While we have made a case for the broken financing of early education, the overstressed 'essential' workers, and the return on investment of the work for children's development, equity goals can only be realized through the maintenance of, and continuity in, classroom and home-visiting community settings. The recovery of the workforce for many industries does not rely solely on extending the early education day so that caregivers may work, but on recovering and building the relational systems that lead to opportunities and resilience when faced with barriers. The funding we request will help us to build toward that goal.

As described above, early childhood educators are paid far less than their peers in K-12 education. With this project, we will get one step closer to compensating early educators appropriately for the work they do. Additionally, the impact of the pandemic on families with young children – especially BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) families – has not been equally distributed. With this project, we will provide critical, high-quality child care services through a strong, existing program to more than 200 families who have been disproportionately impacted by the negative effects of the pandemic. Doing so will contribute to an equitable economic recovery by allowing BIPOC families and those experiencing poverty to access employment, job training opportunities, and physical and mental health care they may not otherwise be able to pursue.

Project Partners*

Identify any subcontractors you intend to use for the proposed scope of work. For each subcontractor listed, indicate:

- 1.) What products and/or services are to be supplied by that subcontractor and;
- 2.) What percentage of the overall scope of work that subcontractor will perform.

Also, list non-funded key partners critical to project.

No subcontractors are needed for this project. Non-funded key partners include:

* Buncombe Partnership for Children: We work closely with the Partnership in many areas, including enrollment, professional development, workforce development, and advocacy.

* Buncombe County Schools: Partner on the construction and operation of the new Verner Central location on the campus of Emma Elementary School, including the Career & Technical Education (CTE) workforce development program.

* Children's Developmental Services Agency: Local agency which houses the infant-toddler program, the IDEA Part B program for young children with disabilities, and partners with Verner to provide child development services to our children and families.

* Community Action Opportunities: The Head Start provider in Buncombe County, with whom we partner to facilitate successful transitions for EHS families.

* MC Ellis: Contracted mental health clinician providing therapy services to Verner faculty and staff.

* Language Preservation Project: Partnering with Verner to provide professional development as well as 12-week language justice collectives for both staff and families. The content will be co-designed with the Verner community, and faculty members and families will have the opportunity to learn together and develop relationships in the process.

Capacity*

Describe the background, experience, and capabilities of your organization or department as it relates to capacity for delivering the proposed project and managing federal funds.

As the recipient of an annual \$2.7 million federal Early Head Start (EHS) grant, Verner has extensive, successful experience in managing federal funds. This includes an in-depth annual single audit and the internal processes and knowledge necessary to track all federal funds and in-kind contributions. As the recipient of a current Buncombe County Fiscal Recovery Fund (FRF) award, we also have mechanisms in place to track and provide monthly reporting on FRF expenses and progress.

Budget*

Provide a detailed project budget including all proposed project revenues and expenditures, including explanations and methodology. For all revenue sources, list the funder and denote whether funds are confirmed or pending. For project expenses, denote all capital vs. operating costs, and reflect which specific expenses are proposed to be funded with one-time Buncombe County Recovery Funds.

Download a copy of the budget form [HERE](#). Complete the form, and upload it using the button below.

2022-23 BC FRF Budget.xlsx

Special Considerations*

Provide any other information that might assist the County in its selection.

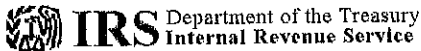
Social Emotional Development Coordinator Job Description DRAFT 3 29 22 (1).pdf

In order to remain competitive in a tight labor market, we must be able to offer increased wages. In just the past few months, we have had to close classrooms for short periods of time because one teacher was excluded due to COVID-19 and we did not have the staff available to cover for that teacher's absence. (All available back-up staff were already meeting ratio requirements in other classrooms.) We have also had staff members resign to pursue job opportunities in other fields because the stress of working in an early childhood classroom during a pandemic with insufficient support was too much to bear. As described above and in a recent Asheville Citizen Times article (Around Asheville, Hendersonville, job openings still far outnumber job seekers, 4/6/2022), the early childhood workforce challenges and resulting shortage of child care slots impacts families and economies across all demographics and industries. It is a critical issue to address for workforce development and economic recovery.

File Attachment Summary

Applicant File Uploads

- IRS Verner name change affirmation of 501c3 status.pdf
- 2022-23 BC FRF Budget.xlsx
- Social Emotional Development Coordinator Job Description DRAFT 3 29 22 (1).pdf



Department of the Treasury
Internal Revenue Service

P.O. Box 2508
Cincinnati OH 45201

In reply refer to: 0248156166
Apr. 22, 2014 LTR 4168C 0
56-2040462 000000 00
00024128
BODC: TE

VERNER
2586 RICEVILLE RD
ASHEVILLE NC 28805

APR 22 2014

Employer Identification Number: 56-2040462
Person to Contact: Mr. Galluppi
Toll Free Telephone Number: 1-877-829-5500

Dear Taxpayer:

This is in response to your Apr. 14, 2014, request for information regarding your tax-exempt status.

Our records indicate that you were recognized as exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code in a determination letter issued in February 1998.

Our records also indicate that you are not a private foundation within the meaning of section 509(a) of the Code because you are described in section(s) 509(a)(1) and 170(b)(1)(A)(vi).

Donors may deduct contributions to you as provided in section 170 of the Code. Bequests, legacies, devises, transfers, or gifts to you or for your use are deductible for Federal estate and gift tax purposes if they meet the applicable provisions of sections 2055, 2106, and 2522 of the Code.

Please refer to our website www.irs.gov/eo for information regarding filing requirements. Specifically, section 6033(j) of the Code provides that failure to file an annual information return for three consecutive years results in revocation of tax-exempt status as of the filing due date of the third return for organizations required to file. We will publish a list of organizations whose tax-exempt status was revoked under section 6033(j) of the Code on our website beginning in early 2011.

0248156166
Apr. 22, 2014 LTR 4168C 0
56-2040462 000000 00
00024129

VERNER
2586 RICEVILLE RD
ASHEVILLE NC 28805

If you have any questions, please call us at the telephone number
shown in the heading of this letter.

Sincerely yours,



Susan M. O'Neill, Department Mgr.
Accounts Management Operations

OGDEN UT 84201-0046

In reply refer to: 0423275033
Apr. 10, 2014 LTR 252C 0
56-2040462 000000 00
00007249
BODC: TE

VERNER
2586 RICEVILLE RD
ASHEVILLE NC 28805-9793



044845

Taxpayer Identification Number: 56-2040462

Dear Taxpayer:

Thank you for your Form 990.

We have changed the name on your account as requested. The number shown above is valid for use on all tax documents.

If you need forms, schedules, or publications, you may get them by visiting the IRS website at www.irs.gov or by calling toll-free at 1-800-TAX-FORM (1-800-829-3676).

If you have any questions, please call us toll free at 1-877-829-5500.

If you prefer, you may write to us at the address shown at the top of the first page of this letter.

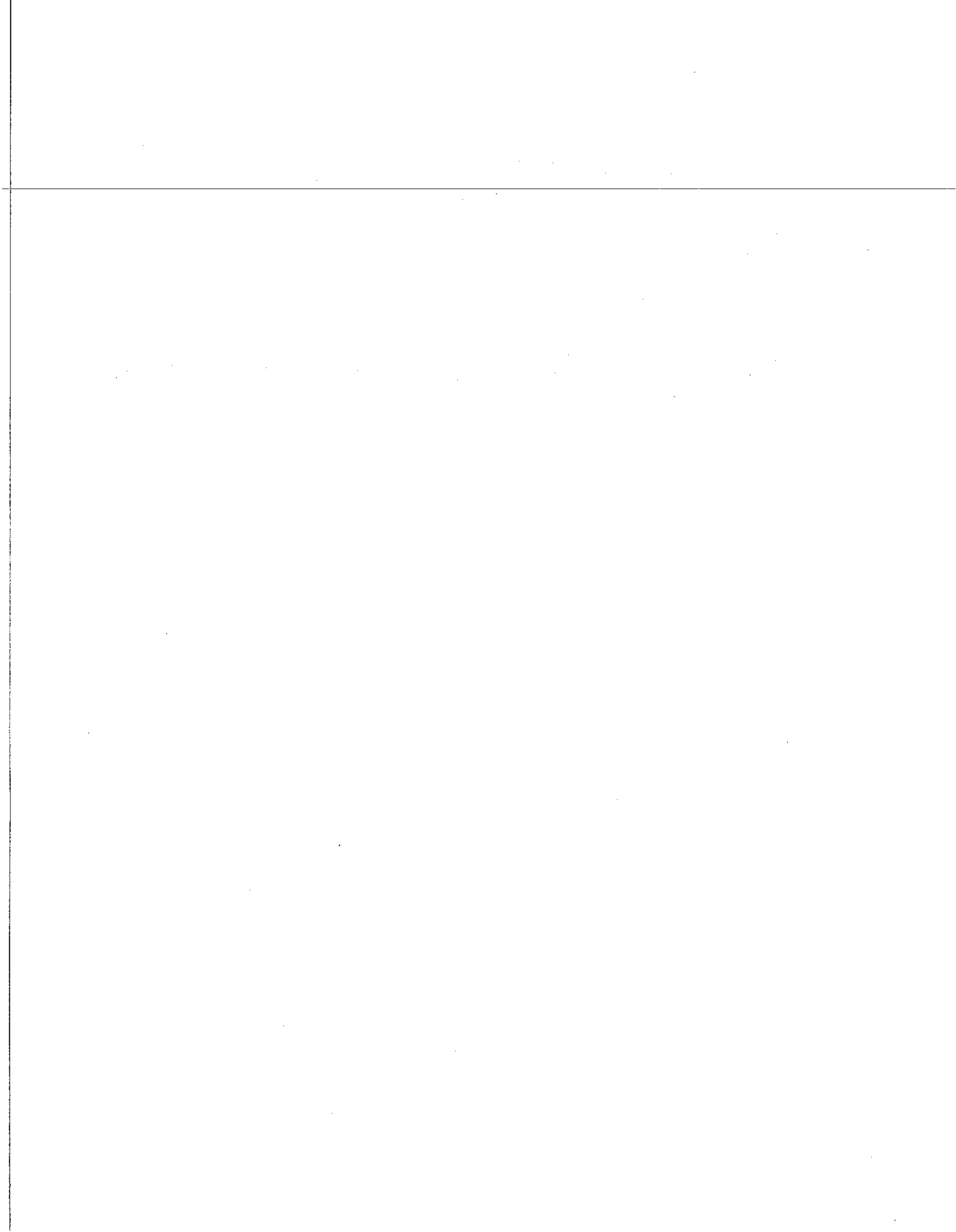
Whenever you write, please include this letter and, in the spaces below, give us your telephone number with the hours we can reach you. Also, you may want to keep a copy of this letter for your records.

Telephone Number () _____ Hours _____

Sincerely yours,

Sheila Bronson
Dept. Manager, Code & Edit/Entity 3

Enclosure(s):
Copy of this letter



Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds Proposed Project Budget

Organization Name:	Verner Center for Early Learning
Project Name:	Supporting the Financial Recovery of Verner's Families and the Workforce Behind the Workforce
Amount Requested:	\$465,739.82

Proposed Project Revenue Funder	Amount	Confirmed or Pending?	Notes
Proposed Buncombe COVID Recovery Funds	\$ 465,739.82	Pending	
Early Head Start Grant Funds	\$ 692,527.00	Confirmed	
DCDEE Stabilization Grant Funds	\$ 20,000.00	Confirmed	
Verner Operating Revenue form Tuition & Subsidy Payments and NC Pre-K Payments	\$ 1,058,791.39	Pending	These payments are projected based on enrollment availability and
List other sources here			
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Total	\$ 2,237,058.21		

Proposed Project Expenses	Proposed	Other Funds	Total	Capital or Operating	Notes
Social Emotional Learning Coordinator salary	\$ 45,000.00	\$ -	\$ 45,000.00	Operating	Draft position description attached in the Special Considerations
Support for salary increases for Assistant Teachers	\$ 42,016.00	\$ 547,040.00	\$ 589,056.00	Operating	Recovery funds to cover the increase in base pay of \$1.01, from
Salaries of additional Assistant Teachers	\$ 225,000.00	\$ 394,000.00	\$ 619,000.00	Operating	Up to 21 additional Assistant Teachers are required to provide high-
Fringe benefits	\$ 74,883.84	\$ 225,849.60	\$ 300,733.44	Operating	Approximately 24% of salaries
Retention bonuses for existing staff	\$ 36,500.00	\$ 20,000.00	\$ 56,500.00	Operating	\$1,000 for staff hired prior to March 2020, \$500 for those hired after
Administrative costs	\$ 42,339.98	\$ 118,688.96	\$ 161,028.94	Operating	10% of total project costs
List expenses here			\$ -		
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Total			\$ 1,771,318.38		

Verner Center for Early Learning
POSITION DESCRIPTION

POSITION TITLE: Social Emotional Learning Coordinator	Created: 3/2022
Reports to: Director of Child Development	FLSA Status:
Program Split:	Dept. Admin

POSITION OVERVIEW:

The Social Emotional Learning Coordinator is responsible for partnering with members of the Child Development team to identify, support, and coordinate developmental services for children within the program who are experiencing developmental variations. The position works with classroom teachers, center directors, families, and therapists to maximize each child's growth and development in the home (for home-based enrollees) and in an inclusive environment (for center-based enrollees).

QUALIFICATIONS:

- Bachelor's or Master's Degree in Special Education, Early Childhood Education, Social Work, or Psychology.
- Knowledge of trauma-informed practices in early education, and an awareness of the early intervention laws and services pertaining to ages birth-five in North Carolina.
- Professional experience in the specialty area of early childhood social-emotional development.
- Excellent oral and written communication skills.
- Working knowledge of local community resources.

RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Supports the individualization of services related to curriculum and developmental variations for children.
- Ensures the individualized needs of children, including those eligible for services but not receiving them, are being met and such children have access to and fully participate in the full range of program activities and services.
- Assists with the developmental screening process (Ages and Stages) for all children at Verner.
- Maintains documentation in the Head Start data system; ChildPlus.
- Develops and maintains relationships with the early childhood community:
 - Links and Coordinates the referrals for specialized services for children with suspected or diagnosed developmental delays.
 - Collaborates with the Children's Developmental Service Agency, Asheville City Schools, Buncombe County Schools, and private providers to ensure services are planned, delivered, and appropriate to the needs of the child.
 - Collaborates with the families and the Local Education Agency to ensure children turning three are transitioned to an IEP, as necessary.
- Provides direct training and ongoing support to teachers in early childhood best practices:

- o Teaching Pyramid
- o Conscious Discipline
- o Practice-Based Coaching
- o Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)
- o Classroom environments are supportive of children’s social-emotional development

PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS:

The physical demands described here are representative of those that must be met by an employee to successfully perform the essential functions of this job. Reasonable accommodations may be made to enable individuals with disabilities to perform the essential functions.

While performing the duties of this job, the employee is regularly required to sit, use hands and fingers, handle or feel objects, tools, or controls, talk, and hear. The employee frequently is required to reach with hands or arms. The employee is occasionally required to stand, walk, climb or balance, stoop, kneel, crouch, or crawl.

The employee must occasionally lift and/or move up to 50 pounds. Specific vision abilities required by this position include close vision, distance vision, color vision, peripheral vision, depth perception, and the ability to adjust focus.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

<p>I acknowledge the receipt of my job description and understand the responsibilities, duties, and requirements to perform the position. In addition, my manager has provided me with any answers to any questions I had concerning the position.</p>		
<p>_____</p> <p>Employee Name (print)</p>	<p>_____</p> <p>Employee Signature</p>	<p>_____</p> <p>Date</p>
<p>_____</p> <p>Manager Name (print)</p>	<p>_____</p> <p>Manager Signature</p>	<p>_____</p> <p>Date</p>