

Increasing Access to High-Quality Early Care and Education at Emma Elementary School

FY2021 Early Childhood Grants

Buncombe County Schools

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Application Form

INSTRUCTIONS

Buncombe County requests proposals for community based projects to enhance outcomes for young children and their families in our community. Grants made through the Early Childhood Education and Development Fund will be focused on access to quality early childhood care and education.

Please refer to the Grant Guidelines published on the Early Childhood Grants website at buncombecounty.org/grants for complete information about the grant program, including: Purpose; Funding; Eligibility; Timeline; Grant writing workshop; Review process; Awards; and more.

Applications are due by 5:00 pm on February 14, 2020.

BASIC INFORMATION

BASIC INFORMATION – Before completing the application, please tell us a little about the request.

Project Name*

Increasing Access to High-Quality Early Care and Education at Emma Elementary School

Strategy*

Recognizing that some projects will use more than one strategy, select the strategy that most closely applies to this project:

Creating new classrooms to serve more children in early care and education settings

Funding Request*

How much funding is this project requesting for FY2021?

\$1,350,000.00

Grant Guidelines*

Have you read and understand the information presented in the FY2021 Grant Guidelines for Early Childhood Grants (Grant Guidelines)?

If no, please contact County staff to request assistance: Rachael Nygaard, (828) 250-6536 or rachael.nygaard@buncombecounty.org.

Yes

APPLICATION

APPLICATION QUESTIONS – Responses to these questions will be scored by the grant committee. Each question is worth 10% of the final score.

Organization*

Give a brief history, including date of founding, focus, services, and record of success.

Buncombe County Schools, in partnership with Verner Center for Early Learning (Verner), will be responsible for this project, with BCS serving as the fiscal agent. BCS, established in 1881, is North Carolina's 13th largest school system and the largest in Western North Carolina. BCS is comprised of 6 school districts and 44 schools and currently operates 3, 5-Star early childhood education (ECE) centers at Erwin, A.C. Reynolds, and T.C. Roberson High Schools, which also serve as Career and Technical Education (CTE) centers where students can earn their Lead Teacher Early Childhood Credential. The success of the CTE program is evident, with 98% of participating students graduating in 2017-18. BCS is partnering with A-B Tech, Warren Wilson College (WWC), and Verner on the "Partnership for Excellence in Early Childhood Education." In this partnership, BCS supports the beginning of the ECE workforce pipeline through its CTE classes in the Owen District, and students have access to observations and hands-on experiences at Verner East through their high school early education coursework.

Verner, formerly Mountain Area Child & Family Center, opened in 2001. Verner fosters wholistic learning environments where young children and families thrive. They work to foster active partnerships with families and the community to nurture the development of the whole child. Verner currently serves more than 250 children ages birth to five, pregnant women, and families, approximately 80% of whom are low-income, in their home-based program and at three centers across Buncombe County. Their centers include one on Riceville Road on WWC property that serves as a lab school, one at Montmorenci United Methodist Church in Candler, and one at Pisgah View Head Start in the River Arts District. Verner is the only Early Head Start (EHS) provider in Buncombe County, serving 165 center-based and home-based low-wealth EHS children and families.

Need for the Project*

What is the main issue this project is established to address? What data or qualitative factors/stories are available to show that need?

There is an established need in Buncombe County for additional high-quality ECE. According to the Child Care Services Association, in February 2019 1,245 children ages birth to three and 2,640 three- to five-year-olds were enrolled in center-based programs; only 54% of those children were enrolled in 5-Star centers. The 2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates indicates that there are 12,922 children in Buncombe County under the age of five, 5,887 of whom are ages three to four. 2,391 (18.5%) of children under the age of five are estimated to live below the poverty line. Therefore, it is estimated that 45% of children ages three to five attend center-based ECE, whereas only 18% of children under age three are enrolled. Further, there is a documented shortage of slots and highly trained and qualified early childhood educators in Buncombe County. This project will focus on Emma, Johnston, and Woodfin Elementary Schools, which are all Community Eligibility Schools where 100% of children receive Free and Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL).

BCS and Verner expect to achieve the following outcomes as a result of this project: 1) provide high-quality ECE and RIMT meals to at least 84 children ages six weeks to five years old; 2) expand the number of slots in this high-quality ECE program by at least 52; 3) improve workforce development by offering a lab

school setting for 25 BCS Career Technical Education (CTE) students; 4) increase access for families from all socio-economic and ability levels, races, cultures, family types, and backgrounds; 5) scale up the high-quality, evidence-based ECE Verner provides; and 6) improve growth and developmental outcomes of participating children as measured by evidence-based child outcome assessments.

Project*

Explain the project and how it will work. Include the overall purpose and any models or evidence-based practices that will be included. What specific activities and milestones are included in the project plan?

Partnering with Verner, BCS requests an additional \$1,350,000 from the Buncombe County Early Childhood Education and Development Fund (ECEDF) to build a new child care center and all technology, materials, equipment, and supplies needed for the interior of the building. This will allow expanded access to high-quality ECE in Buncombe County. Verner and BCS have committed to a partnership to lease a portion of the land on the campus of Emma Elementary School to Verner for the construction of a new child care center. Verner will utilize a high-end, durable modular design which will use financial investments wisely and increase the speed at which the project can be completed. The modular design will allow Verner to cost-effectively begin offering services in the new space in half the time of a stick-built structure and provide the flexibility to expand the number of classrooms as needed or as dictated by funding timelines.

Funds already awarded to BCS for this project by the ECEDF will cover the total estimated site preparations, including design fees, water install, sidewalks, parking, fencing, decks and ramps, playground preparation, permit fees, fire alarms, awnings, storage units, building automation, power install, and sewer install at the new building on the campus of Emma Elementary School. Verner is in the process of requesting funds from diverse sources to fund the remaining project costs.

Once construction is complete, Verner will serve at least 84 children ages six weeks to five years old in the new building that will house 8-10 classrooms, two therapy rooms, observation areas, catering kitchen, staff breakroom, storage, laundry room, and administrative offices. The 32 Early Head Start children Verner currently serves at Pisgah View Head Start and the YWCA will be relocated to the new building, and Verner and BCS will expand access to high-quality ECE for at least 52 more children.

People Served*

Who will be served by this project? Include demographics for children and families served, workforce, and/or any other relevant groups.

This project will allow Verner to serve at least 84 children ages six weeks to five years old and their families in a high-quality, 5-Star, ECE environment and provide healthy Rainbow In My Tummy® (RIMT) meals. At least 32 of those children and families will participate in the EHS program. As with Verner's current locations, many of the families we serve will come from diverse socio-economic, racial, cultural, and family type backgrounds. This year, 78% of Verner students are from low-income families receiving tuition support/vouchers, 40% are led by a single parent, and 24% have a disability and/or mental health concern.

BCS and Verner serve children and families. Driven by an understanding of the importance of supporting the families of the children we serve and a desire to build strong relationships with them, we offer services including classes, individual consultation, and referrals to other community agencies. Family services specialists work with families and caregivers to help them set and meet family goals and objectives, such as finding employment or balancing their budget. They link families to community agencies to provide key services. Verner's Mothers on the Move (MOMs) program encourages and supports families through peer-to-peer support, a critical component for families reaching their education and employment goals. In addition to

fostering strong peer connections, MOMs provides access to financial aid and tuition assistance, affording participants the opportunity to increase family wealth.

Results*

What results do you hope to achieve with this project? Be specific about how much impact the project will have in line with the goals of the fund, and how many people will be served.

For projects requesting funding for slots, also please include:

- Total new slots created
- Total slots maintained
- # of Subsidy slots created
- # of Subsidy slots maintained
- # of teachers/staff positions created
- # of teachers/staff positions maintained

As stated earlier, Verner Central will serve at least 84 children ages six weeks to five years old in the new building. The 32 EHS children Verner currently serves at Pisgah View Head Start and the YWCA will be relocated to the new building, and Verner and BCS will expand access to high-quality ECE for at least 52 more children. If the ECEDF is able to commit in June 2020 to fully funding the project over multiple years, Verner expects to be able to seek financing to complete the construction project and open Verner Central by early 2021 (pending the acquisition of contracts and permits that are beyond our control).

For projects requesting funding for slots:

- Total new slots created: At least 52. This project will also allow the YWCA and Community Action Opportunities to increase available slots as Verner vacates the classrooms they currently occupy at the YWCA and Pisgah View Head Start.

- Total slots maintained: 32.
- # of subsidy slots created: At least 10, contingent upon family applications and funding availability.
- # of subsidy slots maintained: 10 current EHS slots access subsidy for wrap around care.
- # of teachers/staff positions created: At least 14.
- # of teachers/staff positions maintained: 9.

One of the goals for this project is to consider incorporating NC Pre-K as one facet of programming at Verner Central. Working with Buncombe Partnership for Children, Verner will explore expanding the NC Pre-K Program through this project. There could be at least 9 slots for NC Pre-K in the new center. Verner will endeavor to include NC Pre-K as one component of a financially sustainable program.

Evaluation*

How will you know you have succeeded? Explain the project evaluation process, including specific measures that will be tracked.

The project will be evaluated using a number of evaluation tools. The specific performance goals and related tools are:

1. During the construction phase, BCS and Verner will set up milestones requiring contractors to meet specific benchmarks at specific times. This will ensure that site preparation and construction remains on-time and on-budget.

2. Build a new early learning center on the campus of Emma Elementary School, as measured by constructing, opening, and operating a new building.
3. Serve at least 84 children ages six weeks to five years old and their families, as measured by enrollment data in the ChildPlus early childhood software program. Note that Verner intends to open the new center initially with the 32 currently enrolled EHS children, with expansion of services to include the operation of all classrooms as soon as possible thereafter (hopefully within 3-6 months).
4. Provide workforce development opportunities for up to 25 BCS CTE students as measured by enrollment, sign-in/attendance sheets, and pre- and post-assessments.
5. Scale-up high-quality ECE, as evidenced by a 5-Star rating designation by the Department of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE), observations, and family surveys.
6. Improve growth and developmental outcomes of children as measured by COR Advantage or a similar assessment tool. It is anticipated that 90% of children served will achieve a gain in at least 85% of the developmental domains in every 12-month period measured by the assessment.
7. Ensure participating children are ready for kindergarten as measured by kindergarten readiness instruments.

Equity*

Describe your approach to racial and socio-economic equity, both inside and outside the organization. What are some specific examples of practices that are in place or to be put in place with this project?

BCS provides safe and engaging learning environments that prepare students for their tomorrow, where they will become successful, responsible citizens in an ever-changing global society. One of BCS' key values is to embrace diversity. In its 2018-2021 Strategic Plan, BCS committed to improving student outcomes and resilience by using a continuum of social-emotional and behavioral health supports, including restorative practices that improve equity in school discipline and behavior supports. Further, BCS has instituted a district-wide approach, known as "Compassionate Schools," to help educators and school faculty understand the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) on brain development and strategies to build resilience. BCS is also working with United Way of Asheville-Buncombe County and Children First/Communities In Schools (CF/CIS) to co-create strategies to support students and families, such as Homework Diners.

Verner shares these values and consistently works to increase equity through diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. Similar to BCS, Verner staff use trauma-informed practices to support children and families who experience toxic stress associated with systemic racism and help children and families to access opportunities and build tools for resiliency. They are engaging Paul Gorski of the Equity Literacy Institute and EdChange to help them develop and implement organizational strategies.

Collaboration*

List any formal and/or supportive partners. Describe their roles in the project. How will they make it stronger?

BCS received \$500,000 last year through the ECEDF to make site preparations and infrastructure improvements for the Verner Central building on the campus of Emma Elementary School. BCS is now requesting additional funds to complete this project. Verner is in the process of requesting funds from other foundations that invest in improving ECE as a part of the overall health of our region. These pending and planned requests, together with funds from businesses and individuals with a commitment to the long-term health and success of our region, will fund any remaining project costs.

In addition to funding partners, the new center will allow Verner to increase and strengthen existing partnerships with other organizations working in similar and complementary fields. These include local, state, and national ECE and child development organizations, as well as organizations with programs focused

on mental health, disability, workforce development, and family support. Verner has already begun fruitful collaborative discussions with Emma Elementary School and CF/CIS; these mutually beneficial partnerships will also be of great benefit to the Emma community and beyond.

Budget*

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

Explain how grant funds will be used, specifically what type of expenses will be covered by County funds. Describe other sources of revenue, including type of funding, source, restrictions and status.

ECEDF 2020 FY21_ECE_Grant_Budget_Form.pdf

Funds from the ECEDF grant for FY 2020 are in use for design work, site preparations, and infrastructure updates and installations. Additional funds for FY 2021 will be used to build and outfit the center. The budget for the capital income and expenses reflects a carefully planned partnership between BCS and Verner to achieve project success.

Sustainability*

How will the project continue to succeed after the funding of the grant? Explain your plan for making this an ongoing effort.

Verner is a financially sound organization. The planned new Verner Central building proposed here will operate under a balanced budget with the same revenue model as their current successful locations. This model includes the following revenue sources (percentages for FY2020): EHS grants (62%), tuition and tuition vouchers (22%), and other charitable grants and donations (16%).

OPTIONAL INFORMATION

OPTIONAL INFORMATION – This information will not impact grant scoring but will be helpful to the committee.

Partial Funding

If the project were to be offered a grant for partial funding, what factors would need to be considered?

The amount requested in this application is the total amount needed to complete the construction of Verner Central. While we are hopeful that funding for this project will be completed by the ECEDF, we acknowledge that there are many worthy projects applying and that funding is finite. Should the ECEDF decide to award partial funding to this project, Verner will continue to seek financial investments from other funding sources. Additional ECEDF investment would help leverage funding from other donors. A commitment from this Fund to fully finance the project by June 2020 would allow us to acquire financing from a bank and get the site preparations and construction underway in summer 2020. With full funding by June 2020, we expect to be able to open in early 2021 (as long as we acquire contracts and permits that are beyond our control in a timely manner).

Multi-Year Funding

If you would like this project to be considered for multi-year funding (up to 3 years), what amounts would you request for years 2 and 3? What milestones would this funding allow you to accomplish? Explain why more years are needed to accomplish goals.

In order to maintain the current timeline for this project of being fully operational for students and families by Sept. 1, 2021, we must secure commitments for the total project budget (currently estimated at \$2.6 million) by Dec. 31, 2020. Recognizing the likely requests for funding from the ECEDF from a wide range of prospective grantees, we realize that it may be more feasible for the committee to commit to funding this request over two or three years. If the ECEDF is able to commit in June 2020 to fully funding the project over multiple years, Verner expects to be able to seek financing to complete the construction project and open Verner Central by early 2021.

Project Timeline: With a commitment for full funding from the ECEDF by June 2020 and construction completion, Verner Central will target a “soft opening” with 4 classrooms to house the existing students from other locations in early 2021, and grow to include the additional 4-6 classrooms for at least 52 additional slots by June 2021.

Resource Support

How can Buncombe County support your organization with this project and in strengthening your work (related to equity, scale, or impact)?

Buncombe County has already been a key partner in this project, with strategic staff helping to identify potential land for the new center and suggesting that BCS and Verner explore collaboration on the project. The ECEDF has, to date, provided \$500,000 in funding for the design work and site preparations which will help to leverage support from other sources.

Going forward, we hope that the ECEDF will continue to make substantial investment(s) to ensure the project’s completion, thus scaling up ECE resources in our community and expanding the impact of Verner and BCS in kindergarten readiness for at least 84 children at a time – in perpetuity. Buncombe County can also be a solid resource for BCS and Verner as we ensure equity across all of our programs.

Scale-up

What is your vision for how the strategies from this project could contribute to a significant scale-up the overall system to collectively address the child care crisis?

This project will contribute to a substantial scale-up of the overall ECE system by opening a new center with at least 84 children, while at the same time freeing up classrooms at the YWCA and Pisgah View Head Start so that they can expand their own child care programs. The classrooms that this project would allow Verner to vacate can very likely serve more than the 32 EHS children currently educated in them (because EHS limits classroom size to 8 children per classroom with two faculty members, and the next best use is unlikely to have this student limitation).

In addition, Verner is committed to engaging with other high-quality ECE centers and programs to “be the water that raises all boats” to advance the ECE field and its benefits to children and families in myriad ways. Examples include advocacy initiatives like the Western North Carolina Early Childhood Education Coalition, shared professional development for faculty and staff, and other collaborations and resources.

Other

Is there anything else that you want the committee to know?

ECEDF 2020 FY21_ECE_Grant_Budget_Form.pdf

Specific activities and milestones for this project are planned as follows:

1. Upon receipt of the initial ECEDF grant award in June 2019, BCS and Verner fully executed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) outlining each party's requirements and responsibilities (completed November 2019).

2. BCS has engaged the services of civil engineering (Davis Civil Solutions) and architectural (PFA Architects) firms to establish site plan requirements, including the creation of a separate access road (October – November 2019).

3. Verner will engage the services of Mobile Modular to design and construct the building (December 2019 – February 2020).

4. Verner and BCS will submit the design and building plans to all relevant entities for approval (ongoing).

5. BCS will secure the necessary permits for construction (Spring – Summer 2020).

NOTE: The following dates are all based on the commitment of full project funding by June 2020. If full funding is not received by that date, we hope to acquire all funding by December 31, 2020, allowing us to open the new center by September 1, 2021.

6. Once BCS receives the final design drawings and permits, we will bid out the work for the necessary site improvements through our normal procurement process (Summer 2020).

7. BCS will make the necessary site improvements for the new building (Summer – Fall 2020).

8. Verner will recruit and hire additional teaching faculty and inform families of the upcoming availability of new slots (Summer – Fall 2020).

9. Verner and BCS will take receipt of the new modular building (Fall 2020 – Winter 2021).

10. Verner will work with Mobile Modular to set up interior furnishing, fixtures, materials, and supplies in the new building (Fall 2020 – Early Winter 2021).

11. Verner will contact DCDEE to schedule licensing inspections (Winter 2020 – 2021).

12. The new center will open and begin serving children and families (Early 2021).

File Attachment Summary

Applicant File Uploads

- ECEDF 2020 FY21_ECE_Grant_Budget_Form.pdf
- ECEDF 2020 FY21_ECE_Grant_Budget_Form.pdf

Early Childhood Education and Development Fund Proposed FY2021 Project Budget (July 1, 2020 - June 30, 2021)

Organization Name:	Buncombe County Schools
Project Name:	Increasing Access to High-Quality Early Care and Education at Emma Elementary School
Grant Amount Requested:	\$1,350,000

FY2021 Proposed Project Revenue	Amount	Notes
Proposed Buncombe County Early Childhood Grant	\$ 1,350,000.00	
List other sources: Buncombe County ECEDF FY2020 Grant Award	\$ 500,000.00	
List other sources: Glass Foundation	\$ 750,000.00	Over 3 yrs.; \$500,000 guaranteed; \$250,000 matching challenge
List other sources:		
List other sources:		
List other sources:		
List other sources:		
List other sources:		
Total	\$ 2,600,000.00	

FY2021 Proposed Project Expenses	Proposed Grant	Other Funds	Total	Notes
Personnel				
Travel/Training				
Technology	\$ 80,000.00	\$ 13,000.00	\$ 93,000.00	
Curriculum/Assessments				
Licensing/Dues				
Nutrition				
Transportation				
Supplies/Materials	\$ 100,000.00		\$ 100,000.00	
Building Maintenance/Repair	\$ 1,100,000.00		\$ 1,100,000.00	For a new 8-10 classroom modular building to be installed on the building site
Rent/Occupancy/Utilities		\$ 282,000.00	\$ 282,000.00	New sewer, water, and power installation; storage units; fire alarm
Furniture	\$ 70,000.00		\$ 70,000.00	
Playground/Outdoor space		\$ 250,000.00	\$ 250,000.00	Includes site preparation, surfacing, equipment, and materials
Printing/Marketing/Website/Postage		\$ 25,000.00	\$ 25,000.00	
Admin Expenses (Legal, Accounting, Insurance, etc.)		\$ 190,000.00	\$ 190,000.00	Permitting and design fees, taxes
Other (please list in comments section)		\$ 490,000.00	\$ 490,000.00	Additional site preparations, contingency of 5%
Total			\$ 2,600,000.00	

Overall Organization Budget	Amount	Notes
FY2019 Actual Year-End Revenue	\$ 283,012,838.00	283
FY2019 Actual Year-End Expenses	\$ 284,818,772.00	
FY2020 Adopted Budget Amount	\$ 316,237,486.00	Includes all funding sources
FY2021 Proposed Budget Amount	N/A	

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COVID-19 Response:

Good morning. Sorry for the delay. BCS continues working with the Emma Verner project: Currently the design team is moving forward with design and permitting. As long as our "Stay at Home" orders remain the same and permitting construction projects continues, we should be able to complete on time.

Response to Committee Questions:

- Is it possible to see Verner's revenue toward this project as well? It doesn't help to only see BCS's.

Because BCS and Verner are in full partnership on this project, the revenue and expenses shown on the budget submitted to the Early Childhood Education and Development Fund Committee represent all revenue and expenses for the complete project. Verner does not have any project revenue or expenses beyond what is represented on this budget. As noted in the budget, Verner did receive a Glass Foundation Grant for \$750,000 that will be used on this project.

- In the multi-year funding section of the application, you state that if the Committee agrees to fund over a multiple year timeline the entire request (\$1.35M) by June 2020 that Verner could secure outside financing. Under this scenario, what would be the requested annual funding amounts from Buncombe County for the next 3 funding cycles?

Yes, that is correct. If the Committee commits full funding of this request -- even over multiple years -- by June 2020, BCS and Verner will be able to open the new Verner Central in early calendar year 2021 (as long as we acquire contracts and permits that are beyond our control in a timely manner). While our first choice would be to receive full funding in FY21, we understand that this is a large request and that there are many other worthy projects that the Committee is evaluating. Our second choice request would be to receive a commitment for \$675,000 in FY21 and \$675,000 in FY22. If this is not possible, awards of \$450,000 in each of FY21, FY22, and FY23 would allow us to complete the project in early CY 2021. If a commitment for full funding was made by June 2020, Verner would be able to acquire financing to complete the project and to repay this financial obligation once subsequent payments were received. This timeline is still true even with the uncertainties of COVID-19; design work and permitting continue as an essential service in the community. As long as our "Stay at Home" orders remain the same permitting construction projects to continue, we will be able to complete the project on schedule.