Since 2001, North Carolina has provided state-funded pre-kindergarten education, originally via the More at Four Pre-Kindergarten Program. During the 2011-2012 school year, administrative control of the program was relocated from the Department of Public Instruction to the Department of Health and Human Services, and the program was renamed the North Carolina Pre-Kindergarten (NC Pre-K) Program. The NC Pre-K Program delivers a high-quality educational experience during the year prior to kindergarten entry, enrolling at-risk 4-year-olds from low-income families who have not participated in other early childhood programs.

The program currently serves 27,019 four-year-olds, approximately 22% of the 4-year-old population in North Carolina. Pre-K programs receiving funding are mandated to operate 6.5 hours per day for 36 weeks each year. Student eligibility for services generally consists of being from a household with income at or below 75% of the state median income. Yet, up to 20% of children enrolled may have a household income above that threshold contingent on having one of five risk factors, such as a developmental delay or identified disability, a chronic health condition, or limited English proficiency. Not all eligible children are able to enroll in NC Pre-K, as funding is limited. Waiting lists exist in counties where funding is not sufficient to serve all eligible children.

NC Pre-K classrooms are available statewide in privately licensed Head Start programs, childcare centers, and public schools. All programs must earn high-quality ratings under the state child-care licensing system to qualify for participation in NC Pre-K and the state’s subsidy system. Program standards set for NC Pre-K must be met in both public and nonpublic settings.

North Carolina has a maximum class size of 18 four-year-olds and requires a staff-child ratio of 1:9. Lead teachers must have a bachelor degree and a birth-through-kindergarten license. Classroom staff are required to use approved curricula and formative assessments that are aligned with the state’s early learning standards. Staff conduct ongoing formative assessments to gather information about each child’s growth and skill development, as well as to inform instruction.

Starting in 2017, North Carolina began implementation of a standardized Kindergarten Transition Plan. The plan is meant to inform the transition of children from preschool to kindergarten by addressing recommendations for sharing information from preschool to kindergarten teachers, training preschool teachers to transition children, and collecting requisite data.

Funding for the state pre-K program comes primarily from state general appropriations and North Carolina Education Lottery receipts, as well as from federal funds and a required contribution from local sources. In 2016-2017, approximately $209 million of federal, state, and local funds supported the program. The majority of funding for NC Pre-K comes from the state, including $78 million generated by the North Carolina Education Lottery.
NORTH CAROLINA PRE-KINDERGARTEN PROGRAM

ACCESS
Total state pre-K enrollment .................................................. 27,019
School districts that offer state program .......... 100% (counties/parishes)
Income requirement ...................................................... 75% SMI
Minimum hours of operation ...................... 6.5 hours/day; 5 days/week
Operating schedule .................................. School or academic year
Special education enrollment, ages 3 and 4 ................. 10,796
Federally funded Head Start enrollment, ages 3 and 4 .......... 17,329
State-funded Head Start enrollment, ages 3 and 4 ........... 0

QUALITY STANDARDS CHECKLIST

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POLICY</th>
<th>NC PRE-K REQUIREMENT</th>
<th>CURRENT BENCHMARK</th>
<th>MEETS CURRENT BENCHMARK?</th>
<th>NEW BENCHMARK</th>
<th>MEETS NEW BENCHMARK?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early learning &amp; development standards</td>
<td>Comprehensive, aligned, supported, culturally sensitive</td>
<td>Comprehensive</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Comprehensive, aligned, supported, culturally sensitive</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum supports</td>
<td>Approval process &amp; supports</td>
<td>New in 2015-2016</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Approval process &amp; supports</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher degree</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher specialized training</td>
<td>ECE, CD</td>
<td>Specializing in pre-K</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Specializing in pre-K</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant teacher degree</td>
<td>HSD</td>
<td>CDA or equivalent</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>CDA or equivalent</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff professional development</td>
<td>80 hours/year (teachers only); PD plans (teachers only); Coaching</td>
<td>For teachers: At least 15 hours/year</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>For teachers &amp; assistants: At least 15 hours/year; individual PD plans; coaching</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum class size</td>
<td>18 (4-year-olds)</td>
<td>20 or lower</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>20 or lower</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff-child ratio</td>
<td>1:9 (4-year-olds)</td>
<td>1:10 or better</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>1:10 or better</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Screening &amp; referral</td>
<td>Vision, hearing, health &amp; more; Support services</td>
<td>Vision, hearing, health &amp; at least one support service</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Vision, hearing &amp; health screenings; &amp; referral</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meals</td>
<td>Lunch and either breakfast or snack</td>
<td>At least one meal/day</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Discontinued</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring/Continuous quality improvement system</td>
<td>Structured classroom observations; Data used for program improvement</td>
<td>Site visits</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Structured classroom observation; program improvement plan</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RESOURCES
Total state pre-K spending ........................................... $143,419,198
Local match required? ................................................... Yes
State Head Start spending ................................................ $0
State spending per child enrolled .................................... $5,308
All reported spending per child enrolled* .......................... $7,748

* Pre-K programs may receive additional funds from federal or local sources that are not included in this figure.
** Head Start pre-child spending includes funding only for 3- and 4-year-olds.
*** K-12 expenditures include capital spending as well as current operating expenditures.

SPENDING PER CHILD ENROLLED

PRE-K* $7,748
HDST** $8,338
K-12*** $9,282

† Estimates children in Head Start not also enrolled in state pre-K.
†† Estimates children in special education not also enrolled in state pre-K or Head Start.

STATE PRE-K AND HEAD START ENROLLMENT AS PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL POPULATION

Data are for the 2016-2017 school year, unless otherwise noted.