OVERVIEW
During the 2020-2021 school year, as the COVID-19 pandemic continued, North Carolina preschool enrolled 23,718 children, a decrease of 7,341 children from the prior year. State funding totaled $113,509,071 with an additional $68,300,000 in TANF and $3,581,732 in federal CARES funds, up $15,940,600 (9%), adjusted for inflation, since last year. State spending per child (including TANF and CARES) equaled $7,816 in 2020-2021, up $2,361 from 2019-2020, adjusted for inflation. North Carolina met 8 of 10 quality standards benchmarks.

WHAT’S NEW
There was a mix of in-person and remote instruction during the 2020-2021 school year, but all programs were physically open in Fall 2021. Child assessments could be done virtually; classroom observations were not required during the 2020-2021 school year but returned to pre-COVID requirements in the 2021-2022 school year. Additional professional development was required this school year on health & safety, supporting children’s social and emotional needs, and on providing remote instruction. The releases of a cloud curriculum, a family engagement program (Ready Rosie), several teacher resources, and required professional development were all new — and positive — implementations as a result of the pandemic. Teachers reported better understanding of formative assessment and more meaningful family engagement. These resources will be continuously provided during the 2021-2022 school year.

BACKGROUND
North Carolina has provided state-funded pre-kindergarten education since 2001, originally via the More at Four Pre-Kindergarten Program. During the 2011-2012 school year, the program was renamed the North Carolina Pre-Kindergarten (NC Pre-K) Program, and administrative control moved from the Department of Public Instruction to the Department of Health and Human Services.

NC Pre-K enrolls at-risk 4-year-olds from low-income families who have not participated in other early childhood programs. NC Pre-K programs are required to operate 6.5 hours per day for 36 weeks each year and serve as many eligible children as funding levels permit. Eligibility generally requires children to be in a household with income at or below 75% of the state median income (SMI), but up to 20% of children may be in a household with a higher income if they have another designated risk factor. Risk factors include a developmental delay or identified disability, a chronic health condition, or limited English proficiency.

Funding for NC Pre-K includes state general appropriations and North Carolina Education Lottery receipts, federal funds, and a local contribution, with the majority of the funding from the state. NC Pre-K classrooms operate statewide in settings such as privately licensed Head Start programs, childcare centers, and public schools. All programs, whether in public or private settings, must earn high-quality ratings under the state child-care licensing system to participate in NC Pre-K and the state’s subsidy system.

NC Pre-K sets a maximum class size of 18 4-year-olds and requires a staff-child ratio of 1:9. Lead teachers must have a bachelor’s degree and hold or be working towards a birth-through-kindergarten license. Classroom staff are required to use approved curricula and formative assessments 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.
NORTH CAROLINA PRE-KINDERGARTEN PROGRAM

ACCESS

Total state pre-K enrollment .................................................. 23,718
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 .................. 8,491
Federally funded Head Start enrollment, ages 3 and 4 ....... 15,750
State-funded Head Start enrollment, ages 3 and 4 ............... 0

QUALITY STANDARDS CHECKLIST

POLICY                                      | NC PRE-K REQUIREMENT                                      | BENCHMARK                                      | REQUIREMENT MEETS BENCHMARK?
---                                         | ----------------------------------------------------------| -----------------------------------------------| -----------------------------------------------
Early learning & development standards      | Comprehensive, aligned, supported, culturally sensitive    | Comprehensive, aligned, supported, culturally sensitive | ✓
Curriculum supports                      | Approval process & supports                              | Approval process & supports                   | ✓
Teacher degree                             | BA                                                        | BA                                             | ✓
Teacher specialized training               | ECE or CD                                                 | Specializing in pre-K                         | ✓
Assistant teacher degree                   | HSD                                                       | CDA or equivalent                              | □
Staff professional development             | 21 hours/year (teachers); 5 hours/year (assistants); PD plans; Coaching | For teachers & assistants: At least 15 hours/year; individual PD plans; coaching | □
Maximum class size                        | 18 (4-year-olds)                                         | 20 or lower                                   | ✓
Staff-child ratio                         | 1:9 (4-year-olds)                                        | 1:10 or better                                 | ✓
Screening & referral                       | Vision, hearing, health & more                           | Vision, hearing & health screenings; & referral | ✓
Continuous quality improvement system      | Structured classroom observations; Data used for program improvement | Structured classroom observations; data used for program improvement | ✓

For more information about the benchmarks, see the Executive Summary and Roadmap to State Profile Pages.

RESOURCES

Total state pre-K spending ........................................... $185,390,794
Local match required? .................................................. Yes
State Head Start spending ........................................... $0
State spending per child enrolled .............. $7,816
All reported spending per child enrolled* ................................ $10,764

For more information about this data, see the Executive Summary and Roadmap to State Profile Pages.

SPENDING PER CHILD ENROLLED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Pre-K</th>
<th>Head Start†</th>
<th>Special Ed††</th>
<th>Other/None</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K-12***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

† 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.

Data are for the 2020-2021 school year, unless otherwise noted.