

# **Early Childhood Education and North Carolina's Smart Start Initiative**

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### **Historical Perspective**

Significant public support for early childhood education in the United States is a recent phenomenon in comparison to public education. Informal child care was originally conceived as a support for working mothers rather than education for young children and early public funding for child care was designed with that outcome. The formal child care movement began with the welfare and reform movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Formal child care was organized out of concern for immigrant and working class children while their impoverished mothers worked to improve their welfare. Child care centers of today evolved out of day nurseries, begun in Boston in the 1840's, the earliest known out-of-home child care in the United States. (Scarr & Weinberg, 1986, p. 1140). Until early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, child care was generally supported through individuals and private philanthropy. There were no political initiatives that funded any aspects of caring for young children outside their homes in formal structures with guidelines or regulations.

During World War II, federally funded child care was created so that women could go into the labor force to support the war. While this funding was limited to the poorest families, it marked the beginning of significant public support for young children. A significant blow to a growing support for child care came when a child care bill was vetoed by President Nixon during the 1950's that would have made child care available to most of the nation's children who needed it. A decade and a half later, the federal Head Start legislation was passed in 1965 as support for poor children and their families, and also launched the first major federal effort to link the care of young children and early preparation for school.

In 1968 federal funding became available for children with special needs and a statewide network of 18 Developmental Evaluation Centers was created with the goal of identifying, evaluation and treatment infants, toddlers and preschoolers with special needs. That same year in North Carolina, the Department of Public Instruction piloted public school programs for preschool children with disabilities or delays.

A Child Care Licensing System was created in 1971 with minimal health and safety standards. This licensing system was focused on the facilities that provided child care for working parents, rather than the quality of programs for children. Child care teachers were required to be 16 years old and there were no teacher education requirements. Two years later, Governor Jim Holshouser led the state in funding a full-day kindergarten program in North Carolina using

state dollars, and phased it in during his 4-year administration. Governor Hunt followed Holshouser as governor and completed the phase in statewide in 1978.

The first statewide initiative that focused on improving the quality of child care was a two-tiered license, launched in 1986. All licensed child care programs came into the system with an A rating and could choose to voluntarily move to a AA rating by improving various aspects of their programs related to higher quality such as teacher education and teacher ratios. The two-tiered license presented a starting point for improving the quality of child care in North Carolina and provided a mechanism for consumers (families) to become aware of higher quality child care programs.

In 1990 Child Care Services Association in Chapel Hill under the leadership of Sue Russell created the first major early childhood teacher scholarship program at the local level, the Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H.) Early Childhood® Project to address the issues of under-education, poor compensation and high turnover within the early childhood workforce. All T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® scholarships link continuing education with increased compensation and require that recipients and their sponsoring child care programs share in the cost ([www.childcareservices.org](http://www.childcareservices.org)). T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® scholarships significantly increased the number of child care teachers with higher levels of education and contributed toward reduced turnover of teachers. The program was expanded statewide in 1993, and T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Health Insurance and Child Care WAGE\$ was also offered statewide in 1998. These initiatives are now implemented in 21 other states.

With a 2-tiered child care licensing system in place and scholarships available for teachers in licensed programs, the quality of child care gradually improved throughout the state. In 1997, following the expansion of Smart Start, which will be discussed in the next section, North Carolina took another major step toward quality in child care and implemented a Five Start Rated License for all child care centers. This gave families a better tool for decision-making and set a higher standard for child care quality. It also put in place a differential payment rate for subsidized child care based on quality.

### **Beginning of Major Changes**

Over the past 20 years the knowledge and understanding about the significance of the early years of life and the relationship between the early years and later school success have led to major changes in policy and growing investments to support young children from birth until they enter school. Three of the most significant longitudinal studies in this area that have fueled these policy changes and investment of resources are the Abecedarian Study (1974), the HighScope Perry Preschool Study (1960) and the Chicago Parent-Child Study (2001). Each of

these studies followed a cohort of children for many years (some more than 40 years) and showed major educational benefits as well as benefits to society, related to their very early preschool experiences that included family support.

North Carolina's approach to meeting the needs of young children was limited, resources were scarce and the outcomes for young children in North Carolina were poor. In the early 1990's for example, population indicators showed that 20% of children under age five lived in poverty and North Carolina had one of the highest infant mortality rates in the nation. Indicators also showed that the state was 49<sup>th</sup> in the nation in SAT scores. While almost two-thirds of mothers of young children worked outside the home, North Carolina had the worst child care standards in the country. The child care teacher turnover rate was very high, more than one third of all child care teachers left each year, children often had to adjust to multiple teachers within a given year and the majority of child care was not good enough to meet the developmental and learning needs of young children.

In 1992 after being out of office for 8 years, Governor Hunt ran for another term and was elected on a strong education platform, including early education. In announcing a major initiative that he was proposing to launch if elected, Governor Hunt called his idea a bold initiative. In a speech made during the election campaign, he called for a new commitment to children in NC. He said, "It is time for a partnership among parents, child care providers, businesses and government to give our children the good start they must have. It is time for a Governor who puts children in their place: first!"

Governor Hunt traveled the state talking to people about his plan to put children first. He met with business leaders and asked them to join him in doing something different, something that had never been done before. He described it as a way to build a brighter future for North Carolina and talked about the results he was seeking as a way to build a stronger work force. And he asked everyone to join him, to work for his election, and then to act on behalf of young children so that we could build a better future for all the children in the state.

Upon re-election, Governor Hunt followed through on his earlier promise to the people and made early childhood education one of his top priorities because of his belief that kindergarten is too late to prepare children for success and that preparation must begin even before birth. He engaged the state's business leaders about young children and held town meetings all over the state to bring the local business and government leaders together to garner their support. He met with editorial boards in every area of the state and talked to every reporter who would listen. His thesis was simple, if we expect our children to do well in school, work and life, they must have a strong foundation when they start to school, and he made it everyone's business to make sure that happens.

## **Smart Start was Created**

Governor Hunt brought together leaders from health, early intervention, education, and early education to develop recommendations and begin to think about a framework. On March 31, 1993, a Smart Start bill was filed in the North Carolina General Assembly and at a press conference, Hunt unveiled the initiative to the public, a comprehensive birth to 5 initiative designed to provide every child in North Carolina access to affordable, quality early childhood education. “We cannot build a world-class workforce if our children don’t come to school ready to learn,” Hunt said. “Too many children are coming to school ready to fail because we haven’t reached them early enough. Those failures are North Carolina’s failures. We can do better by our children, and we must!”

Under Governor Hunt’s leadership and through his political skill and unrelenting determination, the North Carolina Legislature passed the Smart Start Initiative in 1993 (Section 254 of Chapter 321 of the 1993 Sessions Laws) and the state launched the first comprehensive early childhood initiative in the nation that included both a state level administrative nonprofit agency and local coalitions and nonprofit agencies that were responsible for children from birth to kindergarten. Prior to the passage of the Smart Start legislation, no other state had developed such a comprehensive approach to early education that included a public-private partnership. Various states had created a variety of programs and services but no one had conceived of a unified system with linkages to other support systems. Smart Start was phased in over a 5-year period until Smart Start was funded in all 100 counties and the state annual budget allocation for Smart Start grew to \$240 million.

Smart Start funding comes to the North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc. through the Department of Health and Human Services budget and is allocated to the local partnerships based on a statewide formula. Each partnership is required to submit a funding plan every two years to the North Carolina Partnership for Children and report monthly on their expenditures. They are also required to participate in the Performance-Based Improvement System (PBIS), which is a mechanism for tracking and reporting outcomes. Funded services in local communities include early care and education, preventive health and family support services.

The vision of Smart Start is that every child in North Carolina will enter school healthy and ready for success. It is a public/private approach that requires a prescriptive board at the state and local levels that has the responsibility for making management and funding decisions. The nonprofit organizations at the state and local levels that manage Smart Start were required to be newly created for the purpose of administering Smart Start and could not be already-existing organizations. Smart Start was to be seen as belonging to the community, not just as a part of an already existing agency and work plan.

Smart Start has achieved significant results. Over 30 research studies have been completed by the Frank Porter Graham Institute at the University of North Carolina. The studies show positive results in all areas of the program and demonstrate that children who are supported by Smart Start enter school with better math and language skills and fewer behavioral problems when compared to all other children. Other studies demonstrate the success of the collaborative model and the success of inclusion of children with special needs as well as other positive results.

There are many individual stories of Smart Start's success. A family in Davidson County got connected to a Smart Start home visitor through their local school. Two of their children had been born with severe disabilities and had later died. When they met with the Smart Start home visitor, they had recently given birth to a baby without disabilities and they wanted to be sure they were doing the right things for him. With the guidance of the home visitor, they learned and asked many questions. Both parents had only limited education and were not good readers themselves. But they were quick learners and did all the things the Smart Start home visitor suggested they do...hold and nurture him; read to him daily; talk with him to increase his language; and provide concrete learning experiences to build his cognitive skills. The home visitor demonstrated how to do these things and provided books and materials. The child is now in 4<sup>th</sup> grade and has led his class every year in end of grade testing. His parents say this wouldn't have happened if they had not been involved in the Smart Start home visitation program. The mom is a champion for Smart Start and tells her story everywhere she goes.

The story of Smart Start is a story that begins with Governor Hunt's vision, passion, political skills and determination to make a difference. His interest in young children was the result of questioning teachers like Carole Wilson about what he could do to improve education in North Carolina and hearing that some children entered school already behind their peers. Political colleagues like Lucy Bode helped to stimulate his ideas by encouraging him to launch a big effort. And his vision was fueled by the birth of his own grandchildren whom he watched respond, grow and learn right before his eyes. These experiences helped him inspire thousands of people across the state to work on behalf of the state's youngest citizens.

Smart Start has served as a model for other states. Because of the major interest in learning Smart Start's lessons, several large foundations, Carnegie Corporation of New York, David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Park Foundation and Heron Foundation, provided funding for almost 10 years for Smart Start's National Technical Assistance Center (NTAC). Other foundations such as W. K. Kellogg Foundation and the Birth to Five Policy Alliance have continued to substantially support the work to disseminate Smart Start's learnings and best practices to other states. NTAC coordinates and funds an annual Smart Start conference, which brings people from every state and several countries to learn from the model and to share learnings from their work.

## **More at Four Pre-Kindergarten Program**

A discussion of Smart Start and early childhood education in North Carolina would not be complete without a discussion of Governor Easley's More at Four Program, which was created in 2001 and phased in over seven years. More at Four was led by Dr. Carolyn Cobb and housed in Governor Easley's office.

Because the Smart Start infrastructure was already in place, funds were maximized and additional children who fit More at Four's at-risk factors were enrolled quickly, which moved the program swiftly throughout the state. Local advisory committees were required to be co-chaired by each county's Smart Start board chair and School Superintendent. And the needs assessments and planning that had already taken place helped to inform the More at Four leaders about where spaces were needed.

More at Four requires certain eligibility requirements related to at-risk factors and high standards for 4-year old classes that serve More at Four children. More at Four is open to children with at-risk factors who are 4 years old by October 16. At-risk is primarily defined as low income and may also include limited English proficiency, children with developmental disabilities, chronic health programs or having a developmental or educational need.

More at Four standards include rules about licensing and star ratings, curricula, teacher education as well as child learning standards. The Frank Porter Graham Institute at the University of North Carolina has conducted research on More at Four since its inception in 2001. Their research looks at both the quality of programs and outcomes for children who are served in More at Four slots. Results show that the program has achieved a high standard of quality and that More at Four children are continuing to grow in all the areas associated with school readiness.

## **Political Challenges**

Smart Start is a comprehensive planning and funding initiative and More at Four is a specific programmatic strategy for a specific at-risk population of four year olds. There has been continuing debate about whether the state needs two major early childhood programs. During the 2009 legislative session a proposal was discussed that would have combined the programs under one administrative structure. Currently Smart Start funding comes through the Department of Health and Human Services and More at Four is a part of the Office of School Readiness within the Department of Public Instruction. At the local level is administered either by Smart Start or by the public school system, based on a local decision. Regardless of where the administrative function lies, most counties have a strong working relationship between Smart Start and More at Four and work to build consistency and maximize both efforts. During the session, some legislators argued that combining the two would streamline the administration and make it easier for local communities to serve the children who most need services without responding to two different funding entities with different rules and reporting

systems. This debate created a lot of responses from local communities and there was clearly no consensus on what the next steps should be. As a result no decisions were made and the debate led to the creation of a study committee that is currently meeting to discuss consolidation and will develop a report and recommendations for the General Assembly in early 2010.

## Historical Arc

Even though North Carolina’s history of educating young children is relatively recent, it is a rich history and is outlined in the chart that follows. (Chart developed by North Carolina’s Early Childhood Governance Group in 2004.)

### **Evolution of North Carolina’s Early Care and Education System**

1965	Federal Head Start Created
1968	Statewide Network of 18 Developmental Evaluation Centers was Created for Identification, Evaluation, and Treatment of Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers with Special Needs
1968	Department of Public Instruction Piloted Public School Programs for Preschool Children with Disabilities or Delays
Early 1970’s	Created Network of Community-based Centers to Provide Services, Research and Training for Children with Autism
1971	Child Care Licensing System created- minimal health and safety standards

1973	NC funds pilot full-day kindergarten programs with state dollars
1973-1978	Full-day kindergartens phased in for all eligible children statewide
Early 1980's	Developed Child Service Coordination System to Identify and Follow Children At Risk for Disabilities
1986	Two-tiered License for Child Care Centers (A, AA) Developed
1987	State Participation in the Infant/Toddler Program (Part H of IDEA) and the Preschool Grant Program (Part B, 619 of IDEA)
1990	T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship Program Created at Local Level
1990	Large Infusion of Subsidy Funds/FSA
1992	Tiered Reimbursement created paying 110% for AA Centers
1993	State and Local Interagency Coordinating Councils Created
1993	Head Start Collaboration Office Created
1993	Smart Start Legislation Passed, a Planning/Funding Initiative to Assure that all Children Arrive at School Healthy and Ready for Success- First 18 Counties Selected (12 Partnerships)

1993	Division of Child Development Created for better coordination of child care licensing and child care quality initiatives; Head Start Collaboration Director and Interagency Coordinating Council Director moved into Division of Child Development
1993	Expansion of Child Care Dependent Tax Credit
1993	T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® scholarships were offered statewide
1994	Child Care Licensing Standards Improved for Infants/Toddlers
1997	Five Star Rated License Created; Education Standards Adopted; Subsidy Rates Tied to Stars; Family Child Care Homes included in licensing system
1998	T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Health Insurance and Child Care WAGE\$ was offered statewide
1999	All 100 Counties Receive Smart Start Funding
2000	General Assembly Assigned Lead Agency Status of Early Intervention System to Division of Public Health and Directed the Early Intervention Branch and the NC Interagency Coordinating Council to Identify Statewide Strategies to Better Coordinate Early Intervention Services at the Local Level
2000	School Readiness Task Force's Report defined school readiness. Two-part definition: children ready for schools and school ready for all children (endorsed by the State board of Education)
2000	Early Intervention Design Plan submitted to General Assembly and Directed

	to Base All Future Changes to EI System on Plan
2001-02	More at Four Pre-K Program Created and Funded – Pilot Program
2002-03	More at Four Pre-K funded statewide (Expansion has continued each year since)
2002	NC General Assembly requires a report on overlap between state funded early childhood programs
2002-04	18 Regional Developmental Evaluation Centers Become Local Lead Agency for Early Intervention Services – <b>renamed Children’s Developmental Services Agencies</b>
2002	Governance Committee Convened (supported by Governor’s office, Secretary of DHHS, and Supt. of Public Instruction) with funding by Trust for Early Education and More at Four Pre-K Program (still continues today, with membership changing based on agency directors)
<b>2002??</b>	Regional Interagency Coordinating Councils Established as Planning Partners for the 18 Children’s Developmental Services Agencies
<b>2003</b>	Child Care Resource and Referral System consolidated to 18 agencies and R&R Council created. Infant/toddler specialists added 2004; Health, Social, Behavioral specialists added 2005
<b>2003</b>	ECCS Grant Awarded to NC (planning & implementation phases funded)

<b>2003-05</b>	Early Learning Standards (Foundations) developed (ages 3-5)
<b>2005</b>	Five-Star Rated License revised to strengthen criteria
<b>2005</b>	Office of School Readiness established: merged More at Four Pre-K Program and other public preschool programs, including preschool disabilities 3-5, Title I preschool, and Even Start.
<b>2005</b>	Shared Indicators for School Readiness initiated as part of the ECCS Grant activity
<b>2006</b>	Office of School Readiness transferred from Governor's Office and DHHS to the NC Dept. of Public Instruction. Head Start State collaboration Office transferred from DHHS to the OSR.
<b>2006</b>	State Lottery Established. More at Four funding transferred totally to lottery in 2006-07.
<b>2006-07</b>	Early Learning Standards (Foundations) required in all More at Four Pre-K Programs this school year
<b>2006-07</b>	Infant/Toddler Standards in the process of development
<b>2006-07</b>	Ready Schools Task Force Convened by Supt. of Public Instruction (funded by Kellogg Foundation)

2007	Ready Schools Initiative Implementation begins
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### **Policy Challenges in Early Childhood Education**

The two major challenges that face the state regarding early childhood education are adequately educating the public about the needs of young children and the relationship between early childhood and later school outcomes; and garnering adequate public funding to meet the early developmental and learning needs of young children.

*Educating the public* about how children think and learn and how important early childhood is to a child’s future development has been a slow, methodical process. While most people value young children, many do not understand the direct relationship between their early years and later school success. Three longitudinal studies have helped to engage the public and policymakers in discussions about the early years and school success. These studies are part of a rigorous body of research that demonstrates that very intensive early childhood programs can produce lasting improvements in the life chances of poor children.

One of these studies, the High/Scope’s Perry Preschool Study, one of the longest running and best known of the studies demonstrated the effects of preschool education linked with family support. This study has followed its students for 40 years and found such outcomes as higher IQ scores, increased high school graduation rates and other educational attainment. In addition, they demonstrated many additional benefits to society such as higher employment rates and lifetime earnings, greater employment stability, higher family stability and dramatically reduced involvement with crime. These benefits result in a public benefit of \$13 for every dollar of public funding invested in these programs.

Many public education campaigns have been launched, including a major campaign that was launched in the early days of Smart Start. Using teachers and pediatricians as spokespersons, the campaign focused on educating parents about the importance of the early years. A later campaign focused on the importance of high quality child care and asked, “Is your child care good enough for your child?” Because children can’t advocate for themselves, much work has to continue in order to educate the public and policy makers about the benefits of early childhood education.

*Adequate funding for early childhood education* continues to be challenging, especially in difficult financial times. Historically, governors who care about these issues such as Governor

Hunt and Governor Easley have used their political capital to garner large amounts of public funding. Once they are out of office however, those funds are at high risk. Smart Start funding, for example, has decreased since Governor Hunt left office from \$240 million to its current allocation of \$195 million.

State leaders and early childhood advocates have used a variety of methods to garner additional financial support. The National Economic Development and Law Center in Oakland, CA, studied the economic impact of the child care industry in North Carolina. This study resulted in three major findings:

1. The child care industry is an economic driver in the state and is a significant industry in its own right, contributing \$1.7 billion in annual gross receipts and providing more than 47,000 jobs;
2. Child care facilitates the success of other industries in the state by enabling parents to be part of an educated workforce; and
3. Child care enables the future economic success in NC by preparing young children for opportunities in the new economy and attracting business to NC's skilled workforce.

This study continues to be used to educate business leaders and legislators in order to increase public funding for early childhood education.

### **Successes in Early Childhood Education**

From a policy perspective, one of the biggest successes for young children is the recent rise in importance of early childhood education in state and national agendas. It is now common to hear people who are running for public office speak about the importance of high quality early childhood education, including the current president of the United States. And almost every state has some kind of early childhood initiative in place or in a planning stage. This dramatic change began with Governor Hunt's creating Smart Start, followed shortly by a report that was issued by the Carnegie Corporation of New York in 1994, known as Starting Points. Starting Points' report, *Starting Points: Meeting the Needs of Our Youngest Children*, raised the visibility of early education and framed an action agenda centering around four major goals:

1. Promoting responsible parenthood;
2. Guaranteeing quality child care choices;
3. Ensuring good health and protection; and
4. Mobilizing communities to support young children and families.

Following the report, Carnegie created a national Starting Points initiative to encourage states and communities to address the challenges posed by the report. North Carolina Smart Start was selected as an initial site and received funding to assist with the work in North Carolina.

Besides North Carolina, 7 other states were selected to launch early childhood efforts. This marked the first time early childhood education was being discussed and funded at corporate and legislative levels.

### **Synergies and Overlap between Content Areas**

When Smart Start was created in 1993 child care teachers were required to be 16 and “not convicted of moral turpitude.” There was not a requirement about high school graduation, much less a higher educational requirement. Putting in place an early childhood professional development system that would produce high quality teachers and the numbers of them that were needed was an immediate concern. At that time, most of North Carolina’s 57 community colleges had some early childhood courses available. A few of them even had early childhood certificates available. But the large majority of them had little available in the area of early childhood education because students were not signing up for them.

Through a partnership with community colleges, Smart Start provided funding to pay for early childhood instructors in community colleges until the classes enrolled enough students to pull down funding from the state to cover those expenses. All the state’s community colleges quickly ramped up their programs, resulting in all of them offering a degree-bearing early childhood program in just a few years. They worked to bring early childhood classes closer to communities because of the limited amount of time that child care teachers had when they were teaching all day. This early childhood program became so popular that there were times when the early childhood enrollment led the list of enrolled students in the Community College System in our state. ([www.eclpn.org/ECLPN policy paper no. 102 Fall 2007.pdf](http://www.eclpn.org/ECLPN_policy_paper_no_102_Fall_2007.pdf))

In addition to creating degree-bearing programs and expanding services, the Community Colleges also worked to develop articulation agreements with higher educational institutions to facilitate their students moving from the community college to colleges and universities to pursue a bachelors’ degree, another example of synergy with early childhood education.

Because of location, time and cost, many child care teachers choose to spend their first two years of higher education at a local community college. However once their Associates Degree is obtained, many want to transfer to a college or university to seek a higher degree. Higher education played a key role in developing articulation agreements with community colleges that facilitated the transfer of credits.

A study that was completed by the University of North Carolina at Greensboro helped to eliminate the unfounded belief that community college students were less prepared than those entering through the system as freshmen. In fact the study provided clear evidence that transfer students in 4-year degree early childhood/child development programs in North

Carolina consistently perform as well as or better than traditional students who began their education at a 4-year institution.

## **Conclusion and Lessons Learned**

While the history of early education is recent and while many recent changes within the field have been dramatic, much more emphasis and adequate funding are still needed. The model of Smart Start was unique when it was created in 1993 and it continues to be a successful model for other states to follow in creating early childhood systems. Using a top down/bottoms up approach, the model engages local leaders and service providers as well as leaders and administrators at the state level to work on behalf of young children, all moving toward the outcome of young children prepared for success in school. This approach had not been done before and no state has yet matched North Carolina's depth and amount of dedicated funding for a public/private partnership approach.

During the time of increased attention to early childhood care and education and the development and implementation of North Carolina's early childhood work, some important lessons were learned.

1. *Dedicated leadership is a critical factor.* Smart Start and More at Four demonstrate just how important it is for that leadership to come from the top. Having North Carolina's number one political and government leaders talking about young children helped to pave the way for change and improvement for young children. In almost every speech he made, Governor Hunt stressed the importance of early education and moved it quickly to the top of the state's agenda. He left no stone unturned, even requiring all his cabinet secretaries to report to him about how they were helping Smart Start move forward. The transportation department, for example, placed all of their new vehicles in counties that needed them to meet the needs of young children and their families. Hunt's leadership was passionate, creative, politically savvy, and tireless. No leader has ever worked harder on an issue and his work continues. Governor Easley drew the line on expanded funding in each of his budgets. He simply wouldn't sign a budget without expansion to More at Four. This is the kind of leadership that is required.

2. *Public/private partnerships are an effective method to achieve public benefit.* Government alone could not have engaged individuals in every county of the state to get the results that Smart Start has achieved. On the other hand, local community leaders and service providers could not have achieved their results without passionate leadership and funding from the state level. A public/private partnership brings together people, innovation, and accountability to achieve greater results that either can do on their own.

3. *True collaboration achieves results that cannot be achieved alone.* Bringing people and organizations together and helping them work together can achieve much more than each of

them can achieve independently. Smart Start required that each local board of directors be made up of designated representatives from all aspects of the community (see table attached). But getting these individuals to come to the table was only the first step. The real test of collaboration is what is accomplished together. Integrating programs, reducing duplication of efforts, streamlining services and serving additional children are examples of some of the important work that resulted in North Carolina's counties where collaboration was successful.

*4. Accountability systems have to be in place and highly functioning to achieve long-term success of an initiative.* Smart Start had some rough starts in some of the newly developing local partnerships. All of the partnerships created new nonprofit organizations and most of them were very small organizations. However they were audited by the State Auditor as though they were agencies of government before they had a chance to put all policies and procedures in place and build their accountability systems. Some of the early missteps led to negative publicity, which was used by detractors to question the integrity of the program and threatened to destroy it before it was fully up and running.

A statewide audit by an outside firm, Coopers and Lybrand, was called for by the Legislature and while it found numerous small issues that needed to be resolved, it was overwhelmingly positive in reporting Smart Start's results and it called for the program to be expanded statewide. Governor Hunt and Smart Start leaders at the Department of Health and Human Services and the North Carolina Partnership for Children used the audit to put more rigid requirements in place for accountability in local partnerships and expanded the state's technical assistance to all counties in the area of fiscal and program management.

### **Future Innovation in Early Care and Education**

The next step for early childhood education in North Carolina is the creation of a state-level structure that brings together all the different components of early childhood care and education. A seamless continuum of high-quality early care and education programs and services that are available to children from birth to kindergarten is needed. Currently services and programs for young children are scattered across at least 6 agencies. Child care is the responsibility of the Division of Child Development in the Department of Health and Human Services, which was created by Governor Hunt to oversee and improve the quality of child care in the state. It also houses the early childhood teacher registry, administers subsidy for poor working families, licenses child care programs and oversees the state's quality rating system for early education settings.

The Division of Public Health is also in the Department of Health and Human Services and is responsible for child health initiatives and oversees the federal early intervention funding for children, birth to 3 years. The Division of Maternal and Child Health manages the state's child

care health consultation initiative, which provides health education and consultation to the state's early education programs.

The Department of Public Instruction oversees an Office of School Readiness, created by Governor Easley, which includes More at Four and also manages the federal early intervention funds for 4 and 5 year olds, in addition to several other federally funded programs, including the Early Childhood Systems grant administered through the federal Maternal and Child Health Bureau.

The North Carolina Partnership for Children is nonprofit, 501(c)(3) organization that administers the Smart Start initiative and funding. Designed to be the early childhood public-private partnership in North Carolina, it is responsible for needs and developing plans to address those needs. It provides technical assistance to Smart Start's Local Partnerships and is accountable for the Smart Start funding as well as the overall outcomes for children and results of collaboration across all funding streams and programs.

While North Carolina has a strong history of working together across all these organizations on behalf of young children, a more combined unit is needed to facilitate programming and to achieve the best results possible for young children. Strong gubernatorial and legislative leadership will be needed to achieve this important end.

Another area where innovative action is needed is building infrastructure to address additional key issues across age groups (e.g., qualified teachers and adequate salaries, high program standards, strong supports for families, and high-quality early care and education settings). Many of the efforts already underway are not funded to meet the current need. While much has been accomplished and basic infrastructure components are in place, additional work and infrastructure are needed.

## **Key Stories**

### *Business Leadership*

During Smart Start's early years there was debate about whether or not the initiative should be expanded to all counties in North Carolina. The debates were politically polarized and often focused on issues not directly related to the benefits of the initiative and children. At that time, Wachovia Bank's headquarters were in Winston-Salem and the President of Wachovia was a true believer in the value of early education and was a key supporter of the program. Frustrated that there was so much debate about the value of the program and its statewide expansion, he paid for a study and report about the value of Smart Start to the economic development of the state and hand carried a copy of the *Wachovia Report on Smart Start* to every legislator. His influence and commitment helped to move Smart Start forward.

### *Local Communities and Support for Smart Start*

Tension existed within the Legislature about the expansion of Smart Start in its early years. In Buncombe County advocates for Smart Start held their legislators accountable for their support and how they voted on all early childhood issues, especially Smart Start. In 1994, Buncombe County's advocates invited one of their key Republican legislators to a meeting where they asked for her full support for expansion of Smart Start. This legislator was in a key leadership position in the General Assembly and they asked her to demonstrate her support by calling the newspaper and making a public statement about it. After long discussions, she did and some think this endorsement may have helped to change the vote and may have turned the tide to successfully expanding the initiative statewide.

### *Commitment of Individuals in Local Communities*

In the first two years of Smart Start, all Smart Start board members, who were key county leaders (see chart at end of report) were required to participate in two multiple day statewide trainings each year that were held away from the county. This was a huge requirement of time for very busy people with a lot of responsibilities but Governor Hunt wanted them to be well informed about their work, the latest research in early childhood education and wanted them to have time away from their other responsibilities to understand their mission, grapple with issues and make better decisions. While this requirement was burdensome for many, a person who was involved in that training as Board Chair from Cleveland County continues to talk about how much he didn't like it but is certain that even now, the decisions their partnership makes are better because of that training and the collaborative relationships they built during that time.

In Rocky Mt. the local partnership created their organization in an old YMCA building in a high poverty area of the town. The Down East Partnership covers Nash and Edgecombe counties and is committed to improving school readiness for all its children, especially children with greater needs. Their setting within the old YMCA has become a focal point that has brought the entire community together. Programs and services are provided there and local businesses are engaged to support the work. A more recent Ready Schools initiative tracks their children's progress through third grade and provides a mentor for every child.

In the westernmost part of the state, the Region A Partnership includes the counties, Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Jackson, Macon, Swain, and the Cherokee Indian Reservation. Collaboration within and across these rural and widespread counties has been a model of success. This partnership makes decisions by consensus and key leadership positions rotate between counties. At one time the Chief of the Cherokee Nation was also chair of the Smart Start Board. A well organized and effective communication system keeps everyone informed.

Region A has been very successful at achieving high levels of collaboration and reached a high performing level in many areas of performance standards that are set out by the North Carolina Partnership for Children.

### *Governor's Leadership*

More than any governor before or since, Governor Hunt made early childhood education the highest priority of his administration. His passion for it was genuine and came across in all his speeches. He often used stories about his own grandchildren to make his points. Once when advocating for improved teacher to child ratios, he talked about the importance of having more adults to children and said, "It's simple. When I'm keeping the grandchildren, it is much easier if Carolyn is there too. Children have a lot of needs and having more adults is always better!" Many of his speeches are recorded and demonstrate his passion as well as his in-depth understanding of the related issues. For Governor Hunt, this area of focus was not a political strategy but a necessary and vital contribution to the care and education of the state's young children and the future of North Carolina.

Governor Easley also demonstrated significant leadership in creating the More at Four program for at-risk four year olds. His willingness to "go to the mat" to make sure the expansion was included in each of his budgets demonstrates the kind of leadership that only governors can provide.

### *Scholarship Program*

The following story was taken from the Child Care Services' website, [www.childcareservices.org](http://www.childcareservices.org) and demonstrates the benefit to a child care teacher in Mecklenburg County:

"On May 7, 1999, I walked across the stage at the age of 37 with an Associate Degree in Early Childhood. My center and T.E.A.C.H. worked together to provide paid release time, a quality substitute while I was in class, and a bonus to me each year after completion of 12 or more credit hours. I was able to bring back to my children, parents and other staff what I learned in the classroom. My understanding of developmental practices has changed tremendously and my confidence has bloomed. When I was tired of taking classes, T.E.A.C.H. counselors encouraged me to keep going. Now I mentor young child care teachers who are in school, and it is so rewarding to see them grow and to know I am passing on the encouragement my own mentors gave me. I wouldn't still be in this field without the T.E.A.C.H. program. I believe in life-long learning and I want to learn more. I hope the T.E.A.C.H. program will still be available when I'm ready to begin working on my Bachelor's degree."

## **Key People**

**Governor Jim Hunt**

**Governor Mike Easley**

**Jim Goodmon- First board chair of Smart Start**

**Ashley Thrift- Second and current board chair of Smart Start**

**Stephanie Fanjul- President of Smart Start**

**Robin Britt- Guilford Child Development Center (Secretary of DHHS when Smart Start passed)**

**Peter Leousis- Deputy Director of DHHS when Smart Start passed**

**Dick Clifford- Frank Porter Graham Institute (First Director of NC Division of Child Development)**

**Peggy Ball- former Director of the Division of Child Development**

**Sue Russell- President of Child Care Services Association**

**Carolyn Cobb- former Director of More at Four**

**Carole Wilson, former teacher**

**Lucy Bode, former Deputy Director of the Department of Human Resources**

**Representatives of local Smart Start partnerships**

**Board Chairs and Executive Directors of Smart Start Local Partnerships**

**Karen Ponder- Consultant; first manager of Smart Start and former president of the North Carolina Partnership for Children**

**Key Legislators (current and former): Sen. Martin Nesbitt, Sen. Bill Purcell, Sen. Bill Martin, Rep. Ray Rapp, Rep. Beverly Earle**

**Business Leaders**

## **Key Themes**

**Early education: preparation for school success**

**Breaking new ground**

**Public-private partnerships**

**Collaboration**

**Business involvement and support**

**Getting support from faith communities**

**Smart Start: A national model**

**More at Four: A Pre-Kindergarten Program with high standards**

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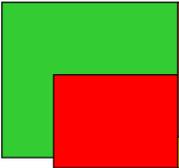
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Papers from NC's More at Four Program

The Story of Smart Start (partially in draft) by Karen W. Ponder



# Smart Start Collaboration

*Business  
Representatives (2)*

*Community  
College*

*Family  
Representatives (2)*

*Library*

*Community  
Foundation  
or Non-profit*

***Bringing  
Everyone  
to the Table***

*Mental Health  
Department*

*Private Child  
Care Providers*

*Churches*

*City and County  
Governments (3)*

*Health  
Department*

*Interagency  
Coordinating  
Council*

*Schools*

*Department of  
Social Services*

*Head  
Start*

*Cooperative  
Extension*

*Resource &  
Referral Agency*