

North Carolina's Early Care and Education System

Report to the North Carolina General Assembly
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Submitted by

More at Four Pre-kindergarten Program
Governor's Office

Department of Health and Human Services

Department of Public Instruction

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“We must build a system of education in North Carolina that gives every child every opportunity to succeed, regardless of geographic location or economic condition. If we are to eliminate the achievement gap and give all children a chance to succeed, then we must provide high quality pre-k opportunities to our four-year-olds who need them the most.”

Governor Michael F. Easley

“We must make sure that every child enters school ready to learn - every child - not just one, not just a few, but every, single child.”

President George W. Bush

Introduction

North Carolina's leadership on behalf of the well being of young children is widely recognized. Still, too many of North Carolina's young children remain at risk – and the consequences of this reality have been all too evident. These children enter kindergarten lacking the cognitive and social skills needed to master the academic demands of formal schooling, exacerbating North Carolina's achievement gap among children.

Governor Easley launched the *More at Four* Pre-kindergarten Program in recognition of the fact that North Carolina's at-risk four-year-olds are not adequately served by the current early childhood education system. The importance of preparing young children to be successful with school demands is well understood by the State's community and state leaders. That understanding lends critical backing for *More at Four*, which is a needed component in the system of educational services for North Carolina's youngest citizens.

North Carolina's judicial branch agrees. The State remains under a court order to implement pre-kindergarten programs for at-risk four-year-olds. In his July 19, 2002 letter, Judge Manning states that, "the *More at Four* Pre-kindergarten program complies with this Court's order requiring the State of North Carolina to provide the at-risk children of the State with the opportunity to obtain a sound, basic education and the continued expansion of this program would show compliance with this Court's previous Order and Final Judgment."

At question now is how to build on the State's early learning initiatives in order to ensure that *all* children have the opportunity to be educationally successful and contribute to the State's social and economic future. *More at Four* provides the method for reaching all at-risk four-year-olds with a high-quality educational program and a powerful lever for raising the bar of program quality for all four-year-olds. It also offers a precedent-setting opportunity to (1) recognize that the educational success of four-year-olds at risk for academic failure depends on the quality of learning experiences available to them during their first four years and (2) build a stronger system for serving children from birth through age three.

Yet the complexity of achieving the desired outcome cannot be ignored. Fragmentation of early childhood services is a national phenomenon and is accompanied by uneven levels of service quality. This fact is recognized in President Bush's early childhood initiative "Good Start, Grow Smart." Early childhood programs are delivered under multiple auspices at state and national levels, operate with varying levels and kinds of regulatory oversight, contend with a complex array of different funding mechanisms, and respond to different public and private expectations.

This report provides an overview of North Carolina's current early care and education system and the financial resources that support it. The report includes a comprehensive progress report on the *More at Four* Pre-kindergarten Program, the newest component of North Carolina's current early care and education system. The report then describes challenges to the current system that impede the State's ability to ensure that all its young children enter school prepared to succeed and undermine the ability of many families to productively participate in the labor force. It concludes with recommendations that address the legislative requirements for *More at Four* in Session Law 2001-424, as amended by Session Law 2002-126 and will move North Carolina forward in our efforts to provide a well-financed, coordinated and high-quality early childhood education system for the children and families of our state.

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I. Purpose of the Report and its Development

The North Carolina General Assembly requires recommendations by January 1, 2003 on the most efficient and effective use of funds from existing State and local programs providing prekindergarten related care and services; strategies to ensure coordination among North Carolina's early childhood programs in addressing the academic and cognitive needs of at-risk preschoolers; any structural changes to Smart Start, the *More at Four* Pre-kindergarten Program and other related programs that will encourage this coordination; and long-term organizational placement and administration of the *More at Four* program.

In order to effectively respond to this charge, it is necessary first to understand the status and intent of North Carolina's present system of early childhood programs and services. Toward this end, this report provides an overview of North Carolina's early care and education system and the financial resources supporting the system. The report includes a comprehensive progress report on the *More at Four* Pre-kindergarten Program, the newest component of North Carolina's early care and education system. The report then describes the challenges to the current system that impede the State's ability to ensure that all its young children enter school prepared to succeed and are undermining the ability of many families to productively participate in the labor force. It concludes with recommendations that address the legislative requirements and will help move North Carolina forward in our efforts to provide a well-financed, coordinated and high quality early childhood education system for the children and families of our state.

This report is submitted by the *More at Four* Pre-kindergarten Program and Task Force, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Public Instruction, and the North Carolina Partnership for Children. An Early Childhood Governance Work Group that represented each of these entities and included other early childhood experts was appointed in Fall 2002 to develop a collaborative response to questions posed by the General Assembly (see **Appendix F**). This collaborative work group developed the draft report and recommendations.

An Advisory Team (see **Appendix F**) reviewed and provided external input to the development of the recommendations and endorsed the final report. The advisory team included local-level representatives of public school systems, local Smart Start partnerships, Head Start, local *More at Four* programs, the private licensed child care community, early childhood researchers and parents. The advisory team also included representatives of the state's business sector involved in education issues.

The draft report and recommendations were then reviewed and endorsed by the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Public Instruction, the *More at Four* Pre-kindergarten Program Task Force, and the North Carolina Partnership for Children Board (see **Appendix F**). These entities formally submit the final report and recommendations, with the *More at Four* Program, to the 2003 General Assembly, as required.

II. Why a Strong Early Care and Education System is Critical

North Carolina's early childhood care and education system (i.e., the system serving young children from birth until they enter kindergarten) is inclusive of all types of early care and education arrangements—Head Start, public preschool, private licensed child care centers, and family child care homes. The success of this system is critical for two primary purposes-- school readiness and economic development.

School Readiness

Every year too many children enter school without the skills and knowledge they need. They enter school behind their peers, remain behind, and become statistics of school failure. A disproportionate number of these children come from low-income families and families facing multiple stresses in low wealth communities. This disparate and unacceptable situation provided the impetus to proactively address children's educational opportunities prior to their formal school entry. North Carolina can ill afford the loss of human potential brought about by a failure to implement a strong preventive strategy.

Compelling research documents what children need in order to develop optimally in their early years. It is clear from research that children arrive at the school door ready for success only if the right experiences are offered throughout their first five years (See **Appendix E**).

High quality, educational pre-kindergarten programs, for instance, have proved to be successful in helping prepare at-risk children for school. Four-year-olds who participate in quality pre-kindergartens are better prepared to absorb the critical lessons of kindergarten. Participation in high quality pre-kindergarten has long-term benefits, as well, improving school performance through high school and reducing school drop-outs.

A single year of high quality pre-kindergarten, however, is not enough to compensate for four years of poor environments, lack of opportunities for learning and the negative effects of poverty. This insight has guided North Carolina's school readiness efforts. The State has recognized that in order to reduce the school achievement gap, school readiness must be seen as a continuum from birth until the child's entry into school. This fact undergirds the importance of complementary efforts by the State's existing programs and services. As more mothers return to employment within six months of the birth of a child, all of the settings that children are in from their first few months of life until the start of kindergarten must be supportive of their progress toward success in school and thus good enough to make the difference. Parents also must be well versed in how to give their children the environments and support that will encourage learning – support provided by both Smart Start and Head Start.

Many children are reared at home by their parents and have little access to preschool experiences. This situation may work well for middle and upper income families – although most of these families increasingly feel the need to supplement home rearing with formal preschool experiences. In fact, most families with young children use some form of out-of-home care and education for their preschool-aged children before they get to school. For low-income families and others with children at risk of poor school performance, high quality preschool – regardless of the program's auspices – can substantially improve the probability of success in school. Notably though, a much smaller percentage of low-income – as compared to higher income – parents use out-of-home, high quality care.

Challenges in Finding High-Quality Early Learning Environments

Because North Carolina's system of early care and education is underdeveloped, families with young children in out of home care face three major problems. First, the State's minimum child care licensing standards are not sufficient to produce the learning outcomes we want for our children. To address this situation, North Carolina has implemented the 5-star rated license for state licensed child care programs, which provides important information to parents about the quality of their child care options. Based on their quality level, child care programs may earn from one to five stars. At the basic one-star level, for example, four-year-old children can be in a classroom of 20 with only one teacher who has only four credit hours of coursework in early childhood education. Although child care programs may choose to meet higher standards, meeting these higher standards is optional, and many programs still meet only minimal requirements.

Second, access to high-quality care and education is inequitable statewide. This situation impacts not only children's preparation for school, but also families' abilities to participate in the labor force without worry as to whether their children are being appropriately cared for and educated while they are at work. Currently, approximately 150,000 young children (from birth to four- years-old) are enrolled in regulated child care facilities across the state. The level of care and education their families can access for them varies greatly from community to community, with families in some communities able to universally access four and five- star care and families in others only able to access one to three- star care. ***Only about one out of four low income children in licensed child care is enrolled in a four or five- star program.***

Four-year-olds do a little better, with about 30 percent of four-year-olds in licensed centers in a four or five- star program. Fortunately, the presence of the *More at Four* Pre-kindergarten Program is helping to increase many families' access to quality early learning environments for their four-year olds.

Finally, families confront North Carolina's and the nation's early childhood workforce crisis. Because of the low wages and benefits paid to teachers of young children (most early childhood teachers are not part of the State's K-12 pay scale), turnover rates are high and few well-educated teachers choose to enter or remain in the early childhood system. North Carolina's early childhood teachers make a little more than \$15,000 a year; 27 percent do not have health insurance from any source. An early childhood teacher makes less than a teacher assistant in the state's public schools. Consequently, less than 25 percent of the approximately 40,000 teachers working in our licensed child care centers have a two- or four-year degree. In addition, the annual statewide turnover rate among early childhood teachers is 31 percent. This situation exists for the state's Head Start programs, as well. Staff turnover undermines the ability to create and sustain strong learning environments for young children, and is, therefore, a significant obstacle to ensuring children's school readiness.

Economic Development

Families with young children need high quality, accessible options for the education and care of their children during working hours. This is the economic development function of early childhood education.

Parents with very young children depend on child care and Early Head Start. Parents of preschoolers depend upon affordable and available continuing care and education options when part day preschool programs do not match the length of their workday. However, high quality child care and preschool costs more than many families can afford. Care for an infant or toddler with a well-trained early childhood professional and a small adult-to-child ratio essential to

individualized attention can cost \$600 - 800 per month, depending on the community. Thus, a family can expect to pay over \$7,000 a year for child care for one child. If the family earns \$28,000 a year—well above established poverty guidelines—they pay 25 percent of their gross earnings for care. That percentage grows for families with lower incomes or with more children needing care.

Few families can afford this financial outlay and desperately need help paying the cost. It is cheaper for families to pay in-state tuition at any one of our state universities than to send their children to a good child care program. Yet, child care is what families need to be able to work. Over 22,000 eligible children and their families are waiting for child care assistance in North Carolina. This figure does not include the many working poor families in our state who are not eligible for child care assistance because their incomes just barely exceed eligibility criteria. Tax credits and flexible spending accounts do not adequately address the needs of most working families with young children in this state.

Consequently, parents choose less than high quality, often unreliable and unsafe early childhood settings. Such choices may allow parents to keep working, but these choices adversely affect the workforce of the future because children are not accessing the learning environments they need in order to enter school prepared to succeed.

To the extent that North Carolina's early care and education system offers access to high quality learning environments, parents will be able to enter and remain in the workforce without child care needs or worries, if the options offered (a) match their needs for care while they are at work, and (b) are affordable. To the extent that young children succeed in school because of a strong early beginning, North Carolina's future workforce will have the education and skills needed to perform in a global economy.

III. Effective Strategies Supporting North Carolina's Early Care and Education System

North Carolina has implemented a variety of strategies to build an effective early care and education system for children from birth to the start of kindergarten. Five strategies are most prominent: Smart Start, child care assistance to families, Head Start, public school pre-kindergarten, and the *More at Four* Pre-kindergarten Program. This array of early childhood programs and funding streams serves both distinctive and common purposes and populations of children. Each strives to link its funding, delivery systems and programming with the other, resulting in an important level of cooperation among these programs. These efforts at coordination are hampered, however, by the different regulatory and funding requirements that guide each program.

Those trying to understand the State's early care and education system may view our array of programs and services as fragmented due to the multiple state and federal funding streams with their own requirements. Fragmentation of early childhood services is a national phenomenon, and as noted in the previous section, is accompanied by uneven levels of service quality. North Carolina has made significant progress in addressing fragmentation through blending funding, coordinating standards, and using a single child care eligibility system. In fact, North Carolina is well ahead of most other states in coordinating its early care and education system. Nevertheless, challenges to creating a more coordinated system remain. The recommendations outlined in the last section of this report seek to address this reality by promoting more efficient use of resources, securing greater program coordination, and ensuring children's school readiness. We believe that implementation of these recommendations offers the opportunity to begin resolving an issue of national import.

Strategy #1. Smart Start

Smart Start, a comprehensive community-based early childhood initiative, began in 1993 in 18 counties and has expanded to all 100 counties. Collaboration at both the state and local levels and local control are basic principles of this public-private partnership. Local partnership boards work collaboratively to plan and fund programs that will best meet the needs of their local communities. This coordination function, and its linkage with ongoing community input, is Smart Start's special – and in fact nationally recognized – contribution to North Carolina's early care and education system.

Smart Start's primary goal is to ensure that children are prepared to succeed when they enter school. To achieve this goal, local partnerships have focused their efforts on three major areas of services: child care and education, family support programs, and health services. Smart Start is unique in its approach. Through the use of local decision-making and the engagement of a wide range of community leaders, Smart Start effectively secures broader community engagement in the issues facing young children and their families and significant private sector funding.

Yet, most local partnerships are not receiving their complete allocation; so their potential in addressing complex challenges has yet to be fully actualized. Even under these circumstances, Smart Start has done much to improve children's school readiness skills.

Improving child care quality is an important strategy for promoting school readiness. National studies like the Cost, Quality, and Outcomes Study (1995) have shown that children who attend higher quality centers have better school readiness skills than those who attend lower quality centers. Results of an independent evaluation of Smart Start by researchers at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute (FPG) at the University of North Carolina indicate

that the quality of center-based child care has significantly improved because of Smart Start. FPG studies have found that the quality of care in both child care centers and family child care homes is related to Smart Start participation. Centers and homes that have participated in more Smart Start activities provide higher quality care than those less involved. In a 1999 study, researchers found that children who attended child care centers that were very involved in Smart Start quality improvement activities enter school with significantly better skills than those who did not. Thus, FPG evaluations have demonstrated a positive relationship between Smart Start and children's school readiness. Consequently, in a number of counties, Smart Start funds are being used in conjunction with *More at Four* resources to provide a high quality prekindergarten experience specifically for four-year-olds at risk for school failure.

Smart Start funding also supports communities' local economies. By using at least 30 percent of its funds to help subsidize the cost of child care so that parents can work, Smart Start has helped families and the child care provider industry become tax-paying contributors. And in the process, Smart Start funds are securing a brighter future for young children in these families, because most of the child care being purchased is in better quality child care settings.

Strategy #2. Child Care Assistance to Families

State assistance for child care costs is an important element of workforce support. If child care costs are too high for families, then family members may conclude that it may not be worth entering, staying in, or returning to the workforce. Without financial assistance, many families who must return to the workforce are forced to turn to undesirable care for their children. North Carolina uses federal and state funds for child care assistance, plus Smart Start dollars, to help lower income families pay for the high costs of child care. The families of over 62,000 young children presently receive child care assistance each month (the system also serves an additional 39,000 school-age children each month in before and after school care).

The State's Work First program has moved many families off the welfare rolls and into the workforce. It also has resulted in thousands of additional families needing child care support. North Carolina has worked creatively to maximize the number of families it helps by expanding eligibility to include more working poor families and by utilizing various funding sources. The state's 5-star rated license system identifies child care programs that offer higher quality care and education. This system provides graduated reimbursements to child care providers tied to the level of quality provided. North Carolina's graduated star system for licensed child care providers is yet another State innovation recognized nationally as an effective approach for quality improvement in early childhood programs.

Strategy #3. Head Start

The federal government established Head Start in the mid 1960s specifically to support school readiness for children from low-income families. A hallmark of Head Start is its comprehensive approach to school readiness that includes education, health, and family support. Head Start programs, which are funded directly by the federal government, follow a set of prescribed performance standards. The last few years have witnessed a major expansion of Head Start, the addition of Early Head Start services for babies and toddlers, and increased attention to the quality of services provided. In 1999-2000, more than 17,000 children were served in North Carolina—about 15,000 of whom were four-years-old.

Nonetheless, inadequate funding for Head Start in North Carolina has left eligible children unserved – and in some cases underserved. Head Start in this state, for example, reaches only 15 percent of the children from birth to five who are in poverty. In addition, only an estimated 7,000 four-year-olds served by Head Start are served in a four or five-star quality

program. The *More at Four* Pre-kindergarten Program, therefore, has sought to maximize the resources provided to Head Start through joint funding, so more children can be served with higher quality early education experiences. Further, Head Start resource dollars often are linked with child care subsidy dollars so that working families and their children have access to a full day early childhood program.

Strategy #4. Public School Pre-kindergarten

Local school districts currently serve approximately 10,000 four-year-old children with federal funds under Title I of the Improving America's Schools Act that targets students who are educationally disadvantaged. In addition, approximately 8,400 four-year-olds and pre-k five-year-olds are served in programs for preschool children with disabilities under the auspices of the schools. Almost 5,000 of these children with disabilities are served in blended settings, such as Head Start, child care, and other preschool settings. There is some duplication in these numbers, as services for children with special needs increasingly are being delivered in inclusive settings – including classrooms utilizing *More at Four* Pre-kindergarten funds. Even Start is a smaller program that serves disadvantaged children and their parents, focusing on early literacy. In many counties, Title I funds, as well as preschool disabilities funds, are being combined with *More at Four* to support participation by additional at-risk children.

These public school funding sources do not fully meet the need for at-risk pre-kindergarten programs and children, however. Consequently, schools frequently have to choose between using Title I for older children versus preschool children, an especially difficult decision in low wealth communities with high numbers of children at risk. And as the stakes rise for K-12 education with President Bush's "No Child Left Behind" legislation, more Title I funds likely will be directed toward intervention and remediation for K-12 school-aged children, leaving an even greater deficit for pre-kindergarten services.

Strategy #5. *More at Four* Pre-kindergarten

Many of the programs and funding streams described thus far serve four-year-olds. However, before the creation of the *More at Four* Pre-kindergarten Program, thousands of at-risk four-year-olds in the state were falling through the cracks, perpetuating a persistent achievement gap in our public schools. An estimated 10,000 to 12,000 at-risk four-year-olds are not receiving any services at all and thousands more are in programs not meeting high enough standards to ensure school readiness. To address this problem, Governor Easley created a standards-driven state pre-kindergarten program that specifically targets at-risk four-year-olds (the year before children enter kindergarten) and prepares them to be successful in school.

The *More at Four* Pre-kindergarten Program complements Smart Start's comprehensive system of supports for families with children from birth to the start of kindergarten. Whereas Smart Start focuses on ensuring that communities can identify and fund priority services for all families with young children, *More at Four* targets the educational needs of the State's most at-risk four-year-olds, providing communities – and the State – with the standards and resources necessary to address this previously unmet need.

More at Four is a highly targeted program, focusing on a specific age group (four-year-olds) and providing a high-quality program (standards-driven educational pre-kindergarten). It is designed to utilize the State's existing early childhood service delivery systems (e.g., Head Start, public school pre-kindergartens, private child care) and elevates the potential of these programs by ensuring that they operate using *consistent standards* for pre-k programs regardless of who

delivers it. This is *More at Four*'s unique contribution to North Carolina's early care and education system and is an important mechanism for promoting school readiness for all the State's four-year olds.

Many of the existing programs that serve four-year olds do not include the standards that have been shown by research to prepare children to be ready for school. The *More at Four* program includes standards based on such research and requires any program receiving this funding to meet (or to be working toward) those standards. Within three years, all *More at Four* sites must be functioning at the 4 and 5 star levels outlined by the Department of Health and Human Services. Thus, *More at Four*'s efforts are helping to ensure consistent standards statewide for all pre-kindergarten programs – regardless of auspices – and thereby promoting consistently better outcomes for children and higher levels of accountability for the State's investments in early childhood education.

Nonetheless, the level of funding available to pre-k programs means that not all four-year-olds can be well-served by North Carolina's existing early care and education system. The first priority for *More at Four* Pre-K Programs, therefore, is finding unserved children, followed next by children who need financial assistance but are not receiving it and then by children who are in lower quality early childhood education settings. In 2001-02, 1621 child slots were awarded in 34 counties. In 2002-03, 6,000 additional slots were funded statewide and are in various stages of being filled.

Unfortunately, this year's budget shortfall has created implementation challenges at the local level, since *More at Four* was not originally designed to support the full cost of care and requires a local contribution. The State's weakened economy has meant that sources of local contributions have been more limited this year, and as a result, many counties are struggling to meet the requirement for the local match. Sections V and VI of this report further detail the successes of *More at Four*'s implementation and its challenges.

Other Key Programs

Early Intervention is the system of services providing support to infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families. The early intervention system is a key support for and partner with the five strategies described above for serving children with disabilities appropriately. Early intervention helps young children with special needs develop their knowledge and skills to reach their potential. A wide range of services is provided for children with disabilities in North Carolina, including service coordination and planning to meet individual and family service needs.

The early care and education system also depends on the support provided by the Child and Adult Food Program. This is a 100 percent federally funded program that provides nutritious meals and snacks for qualifying children in child care centers, family child care homes, and at-risk after school programs.

The TE.A.C.H. Early Childhood Project is addressing the early childhood workforce crisis in North Carolina by helping early childhood teachers improve their education and reduce staff turnover. The most critical indicator of quality child care is the level of education of the caregivers. Children benefit when they are able to bond with a provider who has made a commitment to the early childhood field, who is a specialist in early childhood education, who understands child development, and who is sensitive to the needs of the very young. T.E.A.C.H.

gives scholarships to child care workers to complete course work in early childhood education and to increase their compensation, thus increasing their commitment to the field. T.E.A.C.H. has provided scholarships to recipients in every county in North Carolina. The program is funded by a state appropriation, as well as foundation, corporate and federal funds.

IV. Financial Resources Supporting North Carolina's Early Care and Education System

North Carolina's leaders have laid the foundation for a strong early care and education delivery system, as described by the five main strategies overviewed in the previous section. A significant gap exists, however, in the resources available to the system, resulting in uneven access across the State to early childhood programs and inconsistency in the program quality levels available to families and their children.

In 2001-02, North Carolina spent approximately \$710 million in state and federal dollars on early care and education for children birth to the start of kindergarten. This translates to less than \$1500 per child—drastically less than what is spent on children in public school. In the public schools in 2001-02, North Carolina spent over \$5,000 per child in state and federal funds and over \$6,600 per child when including local school funding. **Table 1** below shows the state and federal funding supporting North Carolina's early care and education system for state fiscal year 2001-02. **Table 2** below shows the budgeted funding for state fiscal year 2002-03.

For four-year-olds specifically, North Carolina spent approximately \$180 million in state and federal dollars in 2001-02. **This compares to over \$543 million in state and federal dollars on kindergarten alone in the public schools in that same year (based on state average per child, not including local funding.)** In fact, when local funds are included, we spend more on kindergarten alone than on *all* age groups from birth to the start of kindergarten.

Thus, although North Carolina leaders have implemented many innovative, effective strategies to maximize the use of these early childhood education funds, the resources are not enough to produce the desired child and economic outcomes.

The most recent estimates available indicate that overall in the U.S., parents pay roughly 60 percent of early education and care costs, with government sources covering 39 percent and other private sources covering only one percent. Because so much of the cost of the early childhood system is borne by parents, unlike the costs for elementary and secondary education, the quality and access to services often is tied to parents' ability to pay

Importantly, the money we spend on early care and education does not buy the same thing for every child. Huge disparities exist in the availability and quality of services. Some communities have very few spaces for families needing out-of-home care. Other communities have spaces but only in low quality facilities. Very few communities have sufficient high quality early childhood spaces to meet families' needs. The disparity in access and in program quality is evident in all types of early care and education arrangements—Head Start, public prekindergarten, community child care centers, and family child care homes.

Services supporting young children's education and care in North Carolina are financed through a wide variety of sources, creating a complex maze of funding streams. These funding streams are linked with diverse educational expectations and varying levels and kinds of regulatory oversight. The assortment of auspices, funding streams, and public and private expectations has created a complex – and often confusing – delivery system for early childhood programs. The complex funding arrangement, in particular, makes decision-making for parents, service providers and policy makers difficult and cumbersome. This reality represents one of the concrete consequences of our State's fragmented system of early care and education and informs the recommendations found in the final section of the report.

Table 1: Funding Supporting North Carolina's Early Care and Education System
Fiscal Year 2001-02

	<u>Federal</u>	<u>State</u>	<u>Total</u> <u>0-5 Year Olds</u>	<u>4 Year Olds</u>
Strategy # 1				
Smart Start -- Total ¹	\$ -	\$ 204,198,744	\$ 204,198,744	\$ 23,703,859
This includes all State funds from Smart Start by Core Services				
Strategy # 2				
Child Care Assistance to Families -- Total ^{2 and 3}	\$ 159,031,655	\$ 38,323,151	\$ 197,354,806	\$ 39,070,892
This includes Child Care Development Funds (CCDF), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Social Services Block Grant (SSBG), and State Funds for Child Care Subsidy				
Strategy # 3				
Head Start -- Total	\$ 137,644,268	\$ -	\$ 137,644,268	\$ 74,437,888
This includes Head Start, Early Head Start, Federal Expansion Funds, Head Start Collaboration Project and Professional Development Funds				
Strategy # 4				
Public School Pre-kindergarten -- Total	\$ 53,264,259	\$ 32,000,000	\$ 85,264,259	\$ 37,653,193
This includes Title I: Basic Grants for Preschool				
Title I Even Start Family Literacy	\$ 4,111,066		\$ 4,111,066	
Special Education Preschool Grants				
IDEA	\$ 11,500,000		\$ 11,500,000	\$ -
Exceptional Children		\$ 32,000,000	\$ 32,000,000	\$ -
Strategy # 5				
More at Four Pre-kindergarten -- Total	\$ -	\$ 5,862,654	\$ 5,862,654	\$ 5,862,654
This includes the initial pilot project funds expended for the entire program.				
Other System Support -- Total	\$ 28,830,153	\$ 51,202,124	\$ 80,032,277	\$ -
This includes T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Scholarship Program				
Early Intervention – Comprehensive ³	\$ 28,580,153	\$ 48,447,220	\$ 77,027,373	\$ -
Total Funding Effort for Strategies SFY 01-02	\$ 378,770,335	\$ 331,586,673	\$ 710,357,008	\$ 180,728,486

Note # 1: In SFY 01-02 a total of \$220.1M was appropriated for the Smart Start program (including local funds for services, state level administration and statewide early childhood initiatives). In response to the budget shortfall of SFY 01-02, Smart Start was required to revert \$8.9 million of their budgeted state appropriations to cover the budget deficit. In addition, all local Partnerships were asked to spend funds only for critical needs in order to maximize unspent funding. NCPC also minimized administrative expenditures in order to provide funding for reversion. Final expenditures for SFY 01-02 reflect these spending reductions.

Note # 2: Figures for Strategy #2 only include funds which are spent for direct child care services paid through the subsidized child care reimbursement system at the Division of Child Development (DCD). These figures do not include other DCD funds which are budgeted to support the overall quality and infrastructure of the child care in North Carolina. This includes funding that supports the regulation of child care homes and centers across North Carolina and other activities which promote high quality care in these settings.

Note # 3 : Breakdowns of State and Federal funds were estimated by applying the state and federal percentages of funds spent for all children to actual expenditures for children in those age groups.

Note # 4 : These figures are actual SFY 2000-2001 expenditure figures. They reflect very closely the SFY 2001-2002 expenditures which are not comprehensively available at this time. This figure includes funds for all early intervention activities within DHHS (DPH, DEIE, DSB, DDHH, DMH, and DMA. Included in this figure are: Preschools for Visually-Impaired Children, Preschools for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Early Intervention DEIE/OES/DPH, DEC's, EI and Early Intervention and Infant Toddlers Grant – DMH

Note # 5 : The Child and Adult Food Program supports child care centers, family child care homes, at-risk afterschool programs, homeless shelters, adult day care centers. \$69,404,472 is the amount supporting food for children through age 12 in child care centers and homes. (It includes the Summer Food and Nutrition Program.) This 100% federally funded program is fundamental the early childhood education support network.

**Table 2: Budgeted Funding Supporting North Carolina's Early Care and Education System
Fiscal Year 2002-03**

	<u>Federal</u>	<u>State</u>	<u>Total</u> <u>0-5 Year Olds</u>	-	<u>4 Year Olds</u> ³
Strategy # 1					
Smart Start - Total	\$ -	\$ 198,554,511	\$ 198,554,511		N/A
This includes all State funds from Smart Start by Core Services					
Strategy # 2					
Child Care Assistance to Families -- Total ^{1 and 2}	\$ 169,542,104	\$ 49,866,160	\$ 219,408,264		N/A
This includes Child Care Development Funds (CCDF), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Social Services Block Grant (SSBG), and State Funds for Child Care Subsidy					
Strategy # 3					
Head Start -- Total	\$ 130,749,161	\$ -	\$ 137,644,268		N/A
This includes Head Start, Early Head Start, Federal Expansion Funds, Head Start Collaboration Project and Professional Development Funds					
Strategy # 4					
Public School Pre-kindergarten -- Total	\$ 54,756,241	\$ 34,500,000	\$ 89,256,241		\$ 39,041,070
This includes Title I: Basic Grants for Preschool					
Title I Even Start Family Literacy	\$ 39,041,070	\$ -	\$ 39,041,070		\$ 39,041,070
Title I Even Start Family Literacy	\$ 4,215,171	\$ -	\$ 4,215,171		N/A
Special Education Preschool Grants					
IDEA	\$ 11,500,000		\$ 11,500,000		N/A
Exceptional Children		\$ 34,500,000	\$ 34,500,000		N/A
Strategy # 5					
More at Four Pre-kindergarten -- Total	\$ -	\$ 35,975,802	\$ 35,975,802		\$ 35,975,802
Other System Support -- Total	\$ 29,350,000	\$ 52,413,795	\$ 81,763,795		\$ 813,795
This includes T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Scholarship Program					
T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Scholarship Program -More At Four	\$ 350,000	\$ 2,600,000	\$ 2,950,000		\$ -
T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Scholarship Program -More At Four	\$ -	\$ 813,795	\$ 813,795		\$ 813,795
Early Intervention – Comprehensive ³					
Early Intervention – Comprehensive ³	\$ 29,000,000	\$ 49,000,000	\$ 78,000,000		\$ -
Total Budgeted Funding Effort for Strategies SFY 02-03	\$ 384,397,506	\$ 371,310,268	\$ 762,602,881		\$ 75,830,667

Note # 1 : Breakdowns of State and Federal funds were estimated by applying the state and federal percentages of funds budgeted for all children to the estimated expenditures for children in those age groups. Funding for subsidized child care is not budgeted with specificity to individual ages. The amounts in this section are estimated to be attributable to these ages based upon the percentages of total SFY 01-02 subsidized child care funds spent on 4 and 0-5 year olds.

Note # 2: Figures for Strategy #2 only include funds which are spent for direct child care services paid through the subsidized child care reimbursement system at the Division of Child Development (DCD). These figures do not include other DCD funds which are budgeted to support the overall quality and infrastructure of the child care in North Carolina. This includes funding that supports the regulation of child care homes and centers across North Carolina and other activities which promote high quality care in these settings.

Note # 3 : These figures are estimated SFY 2002-2003 budget figures. They reflect very closely the SFY 2001-2002 budget as these budget components are not compiled. This figure includes funds for all early intervention activities within DHHS (DPH, DEIE, DSB, DDHH, DMH, and DMA). Included in this figure are: Preschools for Visually-Impaired Children, Preschools for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Early Intervention DEIE/OES/DPH, DEC's, EI and Early Intervention and Infant Toddlers Grant - DMH

Note # 4 : Included in this column are only actual budgeted amount dedicated to four year olds. Some funds for four-year olds will be expended in other areas but we have no way to establish that amount by age - level at this time since funds are not budgeted specifically by age.

Note # 5 : The Child and Adult Food Program supports child care centers, family child care homes, at-risk afterschool programs, homeless shelters, adult day care centers. It is estimated that the same amount of \$69,404,472 from SFY 01-02 is the amount budgeted to support food for children through age 12 in child care centers and homes. (It includes the Summer Food and Nutrition Program.) This 100% federally funded program is fundamental the early childhood education support network.

V. Progress Report on the *More at Four* Pre-kindergarten Program

The *More at Four* Pre-kindergarten Program is the newest component of North Carolina's early care and education system. *More at Four* is an educational, standards-based pre-kindergarten program that specifically targets at-risk four-year-olds (the year before children enter kindergarten) and prepares them to be successful in school. The program was created in 2001-02 to serve approximately 1600 children, and classrooms were implemented in 34 competitively selected counties. *More at Four* has been expanded statewide for 2002-03 to serve an additional 6,000 children. Funding is available to every county that chooses to implement the program.

The Need for *More at Four*

The *More at Four* Pre-kindergarten Program is a critical addition to the state's early care and education system for several reasons. First, the children served by the *More at Four* Pre-kindergarten Program come from a variety of challenges related to lower school achievement, such as poverty, homelessness, or low parental education. The children may have physical or learning disabilities or they and their families may not speak English. Approximately 49,000 four-year-olds are estimated to be at risk of school failure in North Carolina due to low income, disabilities or special needs. While there are other sources of funds in the state devoted to serving these at-risk preschoolers, there are an estimated 10-12,000 four-year-olds who are at risk and who are not receiving any services. Thousands more at-risk four-year-olds are in programs that do not meet high enough standards to prepare them adequately for school.

Hence, *More at Four* addresses a gap in the availability of developmentally appropriate, high quality, educational pre-kindergarten programs for at-risk young children who would most benefit from these programs but do not have access to them. *More at Four* is specifically focused on reaching those four-year-olds who are unserved by any other preschool program or who are "underserved" in programs that are not of high enough quality to prepare them for school. **Appendix A** provides detailed data estimating:

- the estimated number of four-year-olds at-risk for school failure in North Carolina
- the estimated number of four-year-olds served by each type of pre-k or 4-year-old program
- the estimated number of four-year-olds who are unserved and underserved.

Second, the *More at Four* Pre-kindergarten Program meets the high-quality education pre-kindergarten standards that research shows best prepare children for school, such as small class sizes, licensed teachers, and use of carefully planned curricula. Many of the existing programs that serve four-year-olds do not meet such standards. For example, even a four-star child care center may not incorporate the kind of curriculum focus required by *More at Four*. *More at Four* not only provides high-quality pre-k for unserved children, it also provides a powerful lever for raising the bar of program quality for all four-year-olds.

Third, while *More at Four* is a distinct, targeted program for at-risk four-year-olds, it is designed to coordinate with the other early care and education strategies in North Carolina: Smart Start, child care assistance to families, public school pre-kindergarten, and Head Start.

More at Four classrooms are being implemented in the diverse settings serving young children in the community, such as public schools, private licensed child care centers and Head Start programs. *More at Four* funds are blended at the community level with other funding sources to increase the number of classrooms that meet quality standards.

Fourth, in the school funding litigation known as “Leandro,” the court has ordered the State of North Carolina to implement pre-kindergarten programs for at-risk four-year-olds. In his July 19, 2002 letter, Judge Manning states that, “the *More at Four* Pre-kindergarten program complies with this Court’s Order requiring the State of North Carolina to provide the at-risk children of the State with the opportunity to obtain a sound, basic education and the continued expansion of this program would show compliance with this Court’s previous Order and Final Judgment.”

Implementing the 2002-03 Program Expansion

Allocation of Funding

Funds were made available to every county for implementing *More at Four* Pre-kindergarten classrooms for the 2002-03 school year. The number of child “slots” allocated to each county for funding was determined based on their percentage of low income students (using free/reduced lunch percentages provided by the Department of Public Instruction) relative to the total number in the state.

The statewide average allocation per child is \$3640 for all operating expenses. However, the actual allocation per county ranges from \$3200 to \$4200, using formulas based on the Department of Public Instruction’s low wealth formula, with low wealth counties receiving a greater amount per child than higher wealth counties. Counties that received funding in 2001-02 were held harmless in the allocation method. Counties receiving new slots were also allocated \$500 per child for start-up costs.

County Requirements

At the local level, a collaborative planning committee was required to develop a plan for using the child “slots” allocated to the county for 2002-03. County planning committees, chaired by the local School Superintendent and the local Smart Start partnership board chair, developed the county plans to specify the settings for *More at Four* classrooms in that community, such as local public schools, licensed community child care centers or Head Start programs. The county plan provides assurances that program standards will be met in each setting.

The *More at Four* legislation requires a local funding contribution. State funding for *More at Four* provides approximately half of the cost of serving a child in a quality pre-k classroom. The local contribution is provided from state, local or federal sources, such as Smart Start, Head Start, child care subsidy, Title I and other public school funding, and city or county appropriations. County plans report the local budget for implementing *More at Four*.

County planning committees were also required to designate the local administrative agency for *More at Four*. Typically, the public school system or the local Smart Start Partnership was selected. At least one county selected a Community Action Agency.

Counties Participating and Number of Children Served

To date, the *More at Four* Pre-K Program state office has entered into contracts with 90 counties, representing 6600 slots for children under contract. **Appendix B** lists the counties that are participating for 2002-03 and the number of slots per county under contract. Several counties are still in the planning stage.

Several county planning teams chose to revert some or all of their allocated child slots for 2002-03, indicating that they could not use those slots for the current year. Many county teams requested additional slots beyond those allocated to them, stating that they are able to find and serve more at-risk four-year-olds. The state office has accommodated all requests for additional slots by re-allocating reverted slots.

Counties began starting-up classrooms, hiring teachers and enrolling four-year-olds, as feasible, starting in October 2002 and continuing to date. Complete data on enrollments will not be available before February 2003 when the majority of classrooms are operational and most counties begin using the on-line data system that is currently in early implementation stage.

Implementation Barriers

Governor Easley issued his Executive Order to expand *More at Four* in late July, with implementation information and county allocations distributed to counties starting in August. Most counties, however, encountered difficulties in formulating their plans quickly enough to have all classrooms started in time to provide a full school year of service. Because the state budget was not finalized until the end of September, many county planning committees reported that plans could not be completed until their state and local budgets were known for schools, counties and local Smart Start partnerships – primary sources of local contributions. Thus, some children will be served for a full school year and others will be served for a partial school year.

Counties that reverted slots indicated that they could not find adequate local contributions to fully fund the program or that finding space for classrooms for the current school year was a problem. Some counties noted a barrier caused by the non-supplant clause in the legislation, as they had already devoted considerable federal funding into pre-kindergarten programs using Title I and/or Head Start. Others believed that they could not identify the necessary additional number of at-risk four-year-olds allotted to them. For those counties, this was not because they do not have at-risk four-year-olds, but rather they lack the capacity to identify the additional at-risk children who are the most difficult to find and enroll. In two cases, counties felt that they were already meeting the need in their communities by choosing to invest considerable Title I and/or Head Start funds in pre-kindergarten.

Progress in Meeting Legislative Program Requirements

In authorizing the *More at Four* Pre-kindergarten Program, the General Assembly identified specific program requirements. **Appendix D** provides an update on progress in meeting each specific legislative requirement.

Reaching Unserved Four-Year-Olds At-Risk of School Failure

Available data indicate that the *More at Four* Pre-kindergarten Program is meeting two primary goals: serving children at-risk for school failure and enrolling those children who have never received any early childhood services. It is too early to obtain accurate data for the 2002-03 school year. Data for the 2002-03 school year are being collected by the *More at Four* program's external evaluator, the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute (FPG). Additional data will be reported when available.

According to evaluation data collected for school year 2001-02, 75 percent of the children actually enrolled had not been previously served in any child care setting. Almost 1,000 *unserved* children were enrolled in *More at Four* classrooms in the program's first year.

Children enrolled in *More at Four* for 2001-02 met the at-risk criteria, as well, according to evaluation data. For example, 78 percent had low family income, 44 percent had unemployed parents, 9 percent had limited English proficiency and 7 percent had special needs or disabilities. **Table 3** below shows the percent of children across risk factors for 2001-02.

Table 3: Percent of Children Enrolled by Risk Factor

Type of Risk Factor	Percent of Children Enrolled
Significant Risk Factors (Level 2)	
Low family income	78%
Parent unemployment/underemployment	44%
Low parent education	27%
Minority status combined with other factors	34%
Limited English proficiency	9%
Special needs/disability	7%
Combination of Potential and Significant Risk Factors (Levels 1 + 2)	
Family composition (e.g. single parent; guardian; foster home)	46%
Housing instability/homelessness	31%

Note: The at-risk criteria for eligibility have three levels of risk: 0 = no/negligible risk; 1 = potential risk factor; 2 = significant risk factor.

Coordinating and Leveraging Resources

As has been noted by example previously, the *More at Four* Pre-kindergarten Program is coordinating in many ways with other early childhood programs and funding streams at the state and local levels and is leveraging resources for providing high quality services.

State Level Governance and Coordination

At the state level, strong collaboration among the Department of Public Instruction (DPI), the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the N.C. Partnership for Children (NCPC), and the Governor's Office has enabled the efficient and timely implementation of the *More at Four* Pre-kindergarten Program in 2001-02 and 2002-03.

The basic state governance structure is a collaborative one. A *More at Four* Task Force, representative of many constituent groups in the pre-kindergarten area, serves in an advisory capacity and provides general oversight for the program. The task force is co-chaired by the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services. A Director, hired by the co-chairs and the Governor's Office, manages the overall program operation from the *More at Four* Pre-K Program Office, located in the Governor's Office. An executive committee of the task force is available to the Director for policy decision making and includes representatives of DPI, DHHS, NCPC, and state early childhood experts. The budget is established in DHHS and the contract, budget and controller's offices are all contributing to that significant administrative aspect. Staff is being added to the *More at Four* office as needed to oversee implementation of the program standards and fiscal operations, especially at local levels, and to coordinate with other agencies in carrying out its functions.

Several legislative requirements are being addressed through cross-agency collaboration. Listed below are selected requirements and the collaboration involved in meeting them:

- “By the second year of operation, each site shall receive a rating of 4.5 on the *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale – Revised*.” To meet this requirement, the Division of Child Development is using its contractor who conducts the ECERS-R for licensure purposes to expand their work to visit the 2001-02 *More at Four* Pre-K sites and conduct a rating of their classroom environments.
- “*Study of pre-school and four-year-old resources for report by January 1, 2003.*” To meet this requirement, both the North Carolina Partnership for Children, through funding from the Pew Education Trust Fund, and the *More at Four* Pre-K Office are providing funds to conduct this study.
- “*The Div. of Child Development, DHHS, shall conduct a needs and resources assessment of four-year-olds in each county.*” To meet this requirement, the *More at Four* Pre-K Office will provide the funding necessary for this assessment to be conducted by DHHS.

Local Level Planning and Administration

At the county level, coordination was built into the design of *More at Four* in its inception. Each county (or multi-county region) was required to develop a plan for use of *More at Four* funds through a collaborative planning process that included early childhood education representatives from the community. The Smart Start Partnership Board Chair and the Superintendent of Schools were required to chair the county planning team. The county planning committee was charged with including the variety of early childhood service providers in the community – including public schools, Head Start programs, and private licensed child care centers – and giving these programs the opportunity to participate as *More at Four* providers, as feasible and as standards were met.

Several factors influenced the extent and ease with which communities implemented *More at Four* at the local level. These challenges and facilitators are discussed further in the last section of the report. However, it is important to note that the extent to which communities were “ready” could be seen in the collaboration across agencies and the rapidity of implementing the additional *More at Four* slots. Specifically, communities where collaboration was clearly evident across agencies, especially local Smart Start Partnerships, public schools, Head Start and the private sector, were able to convene local task forces quickly, work to decide where slots

were to be placed, and submit plans in a timely manner. Smart Start plays a key role in building an infrastructure for early childhood care and education. Communities where Smart Start partnerships are strong were more likely to be able to begin the planning process quickly. Where Smart Start and schools work closely together, this observation was even more evident.

Local Funding Contributions

Because financial resources and the extent to which counties have already started pre-kindergarten programs through other sources vary widely across counties, each county must determine how it will implement the *More at Four* Pre-K Program. Legislation requires a local financial contribution and also specifies that *More at Four* funds shall not supplant any other local, state, or federal funds. State *More at Four* funds provide only about half the cost of a high quality pre-kindergarten program. Therefore, local communities must combine funds as available to develop *More at Four* Pre-K classrooms. These sources of funds typically are: Head Start, Smart Start, Title I, Preschool handicapped, subsidy, and local allocations, as well as in-kind costs (services and facilities).

The local contribution is essential to operate the program. This has been an especially difficult year for counties to find other funding sources, whether they are local, state, or federal. However, various sources have been found across counties. Local contributions may be cash or in-kind. The specific sources of funding vary across counties according to the types of funds available, amount of funds available, and previous commitments to other programs. **Table 4** illustrates how several counties have leveraged various sources for the 2002-03 fiscal year.

Table 4: Leveraged Funding for Selected Counties: 2002-03

Type/Source of Funds	Rural Co. A	Rural Co. B	Rural Multi-Co. Region C	Urban Co. D	Urban Co. E	Suburban Co. F
Smart Start	\$26,200	\$10,000 cash \$9,414 in-kind	\$115,827	\$270,000 \$35,000 in-kind	\$90,905	\$58,935
Head Start			\$2,500	\$27,056 in-kind	\$107,070	\$322,575
Preschool Disabilities	\$15,555		\$41,667			\$20,807
Private Child Care		\$24,242 in-kind				
Child Care Subsidy	\$24,540		\$396,000			\$28,400
City/County Appropriation		\$64,911				\$13,455
Title I/federal	\$42,860 (incl. Title IV)		\$58,333		\$129,000	
Title IV/federal						\$2,461
Other (food program, grants, etc.)	\$25,947	\$62,051 in-kind	\$6,667 \$18,333 fee for non-classroom service)		\$62,370	\$2,017
Public School Allocations				\$70,271 cash \$89,898 in-kind	\$14,200 charter school	
Other Contributions as Percent of Total Budget	75%	37%	53%	35%	33%	56%

In this snapshot of examples from 2002-03, the range of contributions from local sources to the total budget is 33 percent to 75 percent. **The variety of funding sources across counties suggests that leveraging and maximizing the use of diverse funding sources can best be accomplished by planning at the local level.**

Building on the Existing Early Care and Education System

Children in the *More at Four* Program are served in a variety of service settings: public schools, Head Start Programs, private non-profit licensed child care centers, and private for-profit licensed child care centers. Data collected for 2001-02 show that approximately 58 percent of classrooms were in public preschool settings, 28 percent were in private child care centers, and 14 percent were in Head Start programs. **Appendix C** provides data on children served by county and type of setting, 2001-02.

Professional Development and Technical Assistance

Given *More at Four*'s standards-based focus, the *More at Four* office is actively engaged in providing support through professional development and technical assistance for local *More at Four* programs. This work is carried out through a variety of collaborative partnerships.

First, funding is provided to the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Scholarship Program in order to provide for ongoing training for teachers and teacher assistants to reach the required standards for *More at Four* classrooms. T.E.A.C.H. funding also includes some scholarships for college juniors and seniors who are pursuing Early Childhood Education Degrees and B-K licensure, with the requirement that they look first for employment in a *More at Four* classroom or – should that not be available to them – another pre-k classroom serving at-risk four-year-olds. The *More at Four* Program provided \$250,000 in the 2001-02 fiscal year to the T.E.A.C.H. Program that provides scholarships, tuition, books, and travel assistance, as well as salary bonuses with increased education, specifically for *More at Four* teachers to pursue the upgrading of their credentials. Because of the State's early childhood workforce crisis in this area, that amount was increased to over \$800,000 for fiscal year 2002-03.

Second, to emphasize the need to work with *More at Four* teachers, coordination is taking place with the Birth-Kindergarten Consortium, a group of colleges and universities that provide the B-K and pre-school add-on licenses. Several of these college/universities have consortia in their geographic areas that recruit additional students into the early childhood curriculum and B-K track. Also, liaisons have been made with the Community College System, which provides training for teacher assistants. For easier access, the community colleges are gradually putting their Early Childhood Education courses on line.

These two professional development efforts are especially critical to the local *More at Four* programs' ability to meet *More at Four*'s high-quality standards. *More at Four* Pre-K Guidelines and Requirements specify high staff qualifications, with timelines for meeting them in some cases. Lead teachers must have or obtain within four years a Birth-Kindergarten License. They may have an Associates Degree (AA/AAS) and be working toward the B-K License or Preschool Add-on (for teachers with other types of teaching licenses). Teacher assistants must hold the Child Development Associate credential, and are encouraged to pursue the AA/AAS (two-year) degree.

Table 5 provides data on credentials of teachers and teacher assistants collected for 2001-02.

**Table 5: Highest Level of Credential for Teachers and Teacher Assistants,
2001-02**

Type of Credential	Lead Teachers: Percent N = 140	Teacher Assistants: Percent N = 155
B-K or Preschool Add-On License	28.6	2.3
NC Teaching License – Other	45.0	2.3
Teaching License in Another State	9.3	0
Working toward B-K/Preschool	19.6	9.0
Working toward teaching license	0.9	6.7
CDA Credential or working toward	2.7	32.6
NC Early Childhood credential or working toward	4.5	40.4
Other	2.7	6.7

* Data not reported for 7 Lead Teachers and 7 Assistant Teachers. Data not included for 4 teachers with no credential category indicated and 13 teachers categorized as substitutes.

These data show that only slightly more than one-fourth of the lead teachers in 2001-02 meet the required credential, with another 20 percent working on the B-K license and 54 percent who hold other teacher licenses and could qualify with additional pre-school training. Approximately 10 percent seem to hold credentials far below that expected, although those staff may have been replaced for the current 2002-03 school year. While many of the teacher assistants (over 40 percent) do not hold the required CDA credential, another – and perhaps better – measure of teacher assistant credentials is the type of degree held. Those analyses show that 16 percent hold a two-year (AA or AAS) degree (27 percent are working on one). Additionally, 8.4 percent are working on a BA/BS degree and 16.8 percent hold a BA/BS degree or higher. Thus, 40 percent appear to meet the *More at Four* criteria, which encourages at least a two-year degree or two years of college; and about one-fourth are working toward it. These data clearly show that there is considerable need to upgrade teachers’ and teacher assistants’ levels of credentialing.

Several strategies have been pursued by the state office to support professional development and technical assistance for local *More at Four* programs statewide. In the 2001-02 school year, the professional development opportunities for teachers and staff in the *More at Four* counties funded in that first year include:

- A statewide orientation meeting for all *More at Four* staff, developed in conjunction with and contracted through UNC-Greensboro;
- Two-day workshops across the state during the spring of 2002 on the use of approved classroom curricula;
- A three-day summer institute in June 2002 that provided an intensive professional development program for teachers, developed in conjunction with and contracted through UNC-Greensboro; and
- Support for teachers to attend a five-day summer institute on using the Bright Beginnings curriculum.

Additional professional development and technical assistance activities have been held for all counties in 2002-03 school year and continue to expand:

- Four regional meetings in September 2002, open to participants from every county, to discuss the required county planning process, budget allocations, application forms, and to answer questions from county applicants. These meetings also provided information about leveraging local resources.
- Four orientation meetings and Creative Curriculum workshops across the state in November and December 2002 for teachers in the current school year.
- Three training sessions (with more scheduled) for *More at Four* Programs on the new web-based child/teacher/program database to meet monthly and quarterly reporting requirements.
- A comprehensive website to provide relevant information about the *More at Four* Pre-K program. The website includes program requirements, budget forms and other important information needed by the local sites. The website also serves as a valuable resource for providing information to the public.
- Extensive telephone and email communications as a primary vehicle for state staff to provide technical assistance to local sites, including assistance on meeting program guidelines, fiscal and contracting process and procedures, reporting and related tasks.
- Establishment of an 800 number to provide information to the public about *More at Four*. Coordination with the Hispanic Affairs Office in the Governor's Office to provide information for the Spanish-speaking public.

Finally, the State Office is also exploring the possibility of mentoring relationships between counties. For example, a county experienced in and successfully implementing *More at Four* classrooms may be a "mentor" to a newer county implementing the same curriculum. To assist counties with greater understanding on how to maximize resources, the *More at Four* State Office is working with the North Carolina Partnership for Children, the state Head Start Association, DHHS, and the Region IV Southeast Office of the US Department of Education to develop and fund a spring institute for 20-25 counties around greater coordination and leveraging of resources. Written information on how to leverage funds is also being planned to assist counties.

Achieving School Readiness: Evidence Supporting Pre-K

With the start-up of *More at Four*, no child has yet been in the program for a full 10-month period. The slots allocated for 2001-02 will include children in 2002-03 who have 10-months by June 2003. Therefore, it is too soon to measure results of this particular program. However, there is ample evidence of the positive impact of high quality pre-kindergartens on short and longer-term outcomes for children, especially at-risk children. (See **Appendix E** for a summary of some of these studies). The *More at Four* Pre-K Program was designed to incorporate components of quality identified by these studies.

For example, children who attend higher quality child care and pre-kindergartens show more positive outcomes in school (less retention, better grades). At-risk four-year-olds who attend high-quality pre-kindergartens have shown better schooling outcomes (less retention, better test scores, higher graduation rates), as well as more positive social and economic outcomes as adults (lower arrest rates, higher earnings and employment). Children who have combined early interventions – such as high-quality pre-k, lower class size in the primary grades, and strong parent education programs – show even stronger positive outcomes.

Cost-benefit analyses show more gains for the individual and for society than the money expended on these programs. In one long-term follow-up study, society gained in cost savings about \$4.00 for every dollar spent on quality early childhood programs. In a second study, there was approximately a \$7.00 gain overall to the individual and society per dollar expended, with over \$3.00 of that for social costs savings.

Evaluation of *More at Four*

Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute is conducting the evaluation of the *More at Four* Pre-K program. The design of the evaluation includes several components. For the 2001-02 year, results are descriptive and provide information on the children, staff, and classrooms participating. Issues, barriers, and successes are also described. These elements are also included for 2002-03. However, a sample of children was selected to receive a pre- and post assessment battery to determine the amount of growth in several developmental and educational areas. Because most counties enrolled the neediest children, it was not possible to develop a control group.

An assessment of the environments of the classrooms that were in place in 2001-02 also took place in the fall of 2002 using the Early Childhood Education Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R). Each classroom must receive a rating of 4.5 (out of 7) on the ECERS-R by the second year of operation. Those that do not will receive feedback and technical assistance. Results are still pending.

Longer-term evaluation, following children into the public schools, is planned, as specified in legislation. This will require that a sample of children be followed over a longer time frame. Logistics of finding the children who may go to different schools and districts will be challenging, but will be an essential part of the evaluation plan. An initial look at the children's readiness for kindergarten will be important in a shorter-time frame. Only by following the outcomes for children over time can we determine the ultimate outcomes for at-risk children and the program.

Success Stories

While specific outcome data for children are not yet available, there are numerous individual stories that have been shared with us. Many counties are excited by the quick changes they see in children's behavior and what they are learning. A few are offered here.

- After only 2 months of the *More at Four* Pre-K Program, pre-post assessment score gains for 16 children in this class ranged from 9 months to 24 months across all developmental areas assessed. One child, who scored high at the beginning, remained the same; but had been admitted as an extremely behaviorally disabled child. By the end of the year he was cooperating and exhibiting much more positive behavior.
- Note from grandparent: "Thanks Miss T and Miss R for all you do for "P". He is able to do things now he couldn't do before. Thanks for talking to me each time I call to check on him. He means the world to me and I worry about him, so I call a lot. Thanks for taking such good care of him. He now enjoys school.

- K. is of Spanish descent. Upon entering *More at Four*, K could not speak any English. He was very timid and would hold his head down and shrug his shoulders at every question asked of him. He would cry when his parents left him at school. As a result of being in an environment filled with lots of positive reinforcement and encouragements, K's confidence level has soared. Each morning, K comes through our doors with a big smile and gladly waits for us to call on him for any task.

K is able to write his name, identify his colors and identify some letters of the alphabet. He is also able to communicate some words in English. K's favorite center in the class is the computer center. He has developed many friendships and has been a joy to have in our program.

- "Dear Governor Easley: I would like to...thank you for the opportunity you have afforded my son. He is in pre-k at ... He has always been at home and has not developed socially, etc. Since he has been in the program, I have seen numerous changes. He is eager and excited to learn. He draws every night before he goes to bed. He says his ABC's and has been singing songs.... learned at school. His teachers need to be commended for the job they are doing. My son had a hard time when he first started because he was not accustomed to a structured environment. This program is just what he needed. Thank you again for making this program possible."
- At the end of October, 18 four-year-olds began their first days of pre-k...None of the children had previously attended any type of day care or preschool...The children were wide-eyed and apprehensive...Some cried. After only a matter of weeks, the children are at home in their classroom. There's also noticeable change in the children's abilities. Three boys who are learning to speak English can already say, "Please tie my shoes!" Learning to take turns and share...are skills the children are easily mastering. ...We are confident that the *More at Four* experience is going to be one of the major determining factors in these children's academic success in school.
- ...*More at Four* has provided continuity for our children. We have one child that was homeless..., and we were the only constant for the child's life. Whether she had food became a question. When she came to our center she was well-fed. Our Hispanic children have increased their English language...since their initial enrollment. We have been able to identify some special needs for children and to seek services for evaluations. Based on the assessments and observations, we have seen developmental levels increase (already).

Cost Analysis

Fiscal Year 2001-02 Expenditures

For Fiscal Year 2001-02, funding for 1621 child slots was available and approved for 28 grantees (34 counties) based on competitive grants. During the 2001-02 implementation, 1549 child slots were approved. An additional 72 slots were approved to receive start-up funds in 2001-02 but to begin enrolling children in fall 2002. A total of 1244 children were enrolled between December 2002 and May 2003 in the short start-up year. In summary, there were a total of 1621 slots under contract, 1549 operational slots, and 1244 total children actually served (based on the external evaluator's end-of-year summary data). Thus, 80 percent of approved

operational slots were filled. The following categories of *actual expenditures* are shown for Fiscal Year 2001-02 in **Table 6**.

Note that 2001-02 is not a typical funding year, because of priority placed on professional development and other upfront activities essential to meeting program standards. Administrative and support costs in future years will decrease as a percent of total costs.

Table 6: *More at Four* Program Expenditures: FY 2001-02

Expenditure Category	Total Expenditures	Percent of Total Expenditure
Classroom Start-up Funds (one-time allocation)	\$1,014,572.00	27.61%
Classroom Operational Funding	\$1,608,910.00	43.78%
Subtotal –Expenditures for classroom operations	\$2,623,482.00	71.39%
Professional Development	\$280,207.00	7.63%
TEACH	\$250,000.00	6.80%
Database Development & External Evaluation	\$304,802.00	8.29%
Administrative Costs	\$216,263.00	5.89%
Total Expenditures	\$3,674,754.00	100.00%
Transfer to 2002-03 SFY	\$2,781,746.00	N/A
Total State Allocation	\$6,546,000.00	N/A

Classroom expenditures of *More at Four* Pre-K funds (\$2,623,482) for 1549 child slots were \$1,693.67 per child (\$1,618.43 per slot based on 1621 total slots and \$2,108.91 for 1244 children served)

The 28 grantees reported \$2,187,916 in local contributions as required by the legislation. Local contributions equal 57.62 percent of operational (recurring) funding and 45.47 percent if one-time start-up funding is included. (See **Table 7**) Thus, as intended by the legislation, local grantees provided a substantial portion of the costs for the *More at Four* pre-kindergarten programs.

Table 7: State Compared to Local Expenditures, FY 2001-02

Expenditure Category for Classroom Operation	Total Expenditures	Percent Comprised by Local Contributions
1. <i>More at Four</i> Start-Up Funding	\$1,014,572	N/A
2. <i>More at Four</i> Operational Funding	\$1,608,910	N/A
3. Local Contributions Reported	\$2,187,916	
4. Total Operational Funding (#2- <i>More at Four</i> + #3-Local)	\$3,796,826	57.62%
5. Total Classroom Expenditures (#1 + #2 + #3)	\$4,811,398	45.47%

Budget and Expenditures for FY 2002-03

The budgeted amounts and anticipated expenditures by category are provided for Fiscal Year 2002-03 in **Table 8**. These figures are tentative at this time and may be adjusted during the year. Governor Easley directed expansion of *More at Four* by Executive Order in late July 2002 and planning information was distributed within two weeks, followed by allocations and materials for implementing the program. However, it is difficult to anticipate to what extent programs will be able to get children enrolled given the challenges of the late budget, required local contributions during a year of budget crisis, and the ability to find classroom space at the beginning of a school year.

**Table 8: Budgeted Amounts for Fiscal Year 2002-03
(As of November 30, 2002)**

Budget Category	Budgeted Amount	Percent of Total Budget
Start-up Funding	\$3,000,000	8.15%
Operational Classroom Funding	\$27,740,440	75.40%
Total Classroom Budget	\$30,740,440	83.56%
TEACH	\$813,795	2.21%
Professional Development	\$986,205	2.68%
External Evaluation	\$300,000	0.82%
Database (IT) & Miscellaneous Contracts	\$810,000	2.20%
Administrative Costs	\$1,075,671	2.92%
Reserve	\$2,063,486	5.61%
Total Budget	\$36,789,597	100.00%

The state *More at Four* Pre-K Program Office is entering into and revising contracts with counties as they establish classroom locations and number of slots. Therefore, the numbers under contract will change as contractors are able to establish additional classrooms. A total of 7621 slots are available for the 2002-03 fiscal year. **Table 9** shows the funds and number of slots under contract for the 2002-03 Fiscal Year, as of November 30, 2002.

**Table 9: Funds and Slots under Contract: Fiscal Year 2002-03
(As of November 20, 2003)**

Contracted Category	Contracted Amount	Number Slots	Budget per Slot
<i>More at Four</i> Start-Up Funds	\$2,615,000.00	5230*	\$500.00
<i>More at Four</i> Operating Classroom Funds	\$19,736,682.00	6600	\$2990.41
Total <i>More at Four</i> Funding	\$22,236,682.00	6600	\$3,369.19

* Note. Slots continued from 2001-02 do not receive start-up funds.

- State administrative costs expended as of November 30, 2003 are \$23.41 per slot.
- The amount of local contributions anticipated to date is \$18,704,942. Combined with the *More at Four* funding, the total budget under contract is \$40,941,624. The local contribution contributes 45 percent of the overall local budget and 49 percent of the operating budget (not including one-time start-up funds)

Projected expenditures for the remaining fiscal year are tentative as of this report, as the predominant percentage of funding expended will be determined by local contract expenditures. A few counties are still not under contract. However, if 75 percent of the currently contracted amounts are spent, \$16,677,512 in local allocations would be expended.

The *More at Four* Pre-Kindergarten Program started with a limited number of children and counties participating in the second half of the 2001-02 school year and is expanding in 2002-03 to serve more children statewide. As would be anticipated with a new program, challenges have arisen. Yet despite these challenges, *More at Four* is having a successful start:

- More at-risk four-year-olds are being prepared for school success.
- More of the State's early childhood programs are serving four-year-olds with a stronger educational program.
- The State's investment in early childhood education is being maximized through coordination, leveraged resources, and increased awareness of the importance of high-quality early learning environments.

VI. Challenges Facing North Carolina's Early Care and Education System and Recommendations

As the information presented in this report makes evident, many of North Carolina's young children remain at risk. These children enter kindergarten lacking the cognitive and social skills needed to master the academic demands of formal schooling, producing an unacceptable achievement gap. This cumulative gap impacts North Carolina's present and future economic prosperity – affecting both the current productivity of working families with young children and the knowledge and skills of North Carolina's future workforce.

This report has outlined the strategies supporting North Carolina's early care and education system that is serving the needs of at-risk children and their families: Smart Start, child care assistance to families, Head Start, public school pre-kindergarten and the *More at Four* Pre-Kindergarten Program. Within this array of programs and funding streams is evidence of many effective strategies for linking funding and programming to create a more integrated system and better-prepared kindergartners. In fact, North Carolina is a leader among states in building a stronger, more coordinated early care and education system. However, challenges remain in providing the level of coordination and efficient use of resources needed to ensure that the services provided meet the needs of families and prepare *all* children to succeed in school. North Carolina is not alone in its challenges – across the nation, an extensive search is underway for solutions that will promote efficient use of resources, ensure program coordination, and make certain that all children are prepared for school.

The *More at Four* Pre-Kindergarten Program, the newest component of the system, provides a powerful lever for raising the bar of program quality for all four-year-olds. It also provides the opportunity to recognize that the educational success of four-year-olds at risk of academic failure depends on the quality of learning experiences available to them during their first four years and to build a stronger system for serving children from birth through age three, as well.

This section identifies some of the challenges currently facing the system in North Carolina and makes recommendations that will help move North Carolina forward in our efforts to provide a well-financed, coordinated and high quality early childhood education system for the children and families of our state.

Providing Adequate Resources and Using Resources Effectively

The early care and education system, serving children from birth to the start of kindergarten, in North Carolina is supported by approximately \$710 million in state and federal dollars – drastically less per child than what is spent on public education – and far short of meeting our school readiness goals. For four-year-olds specifically, North Carolina spent approximately \$180 million in state and federal dollars in 2001-02. **This compares to over \$543 million in state and federal dollars on kindergarten alone in the public schools in that same year (based on state average per child, not including local funding.)**

A key challenge is how to expand high-quality educational experiences for four-year-olds without diminishing the quality of early care and education available to children from birth through three. We know that school readiness requires attention to children's experiences

throughout the first five years of their lives. Early childhood teachers will be attracted to teach in *More at Four* classrooms with its salaries that are commensurate with those of public school teachers. And many of these teachers will come from classrooms serving younger children. In addition, the costs of providing quality infant classrooms in child care settings is underwritten by the revenue from classes for three- and four- year- old children. Dwindling four-year-old enrollments will diminish this revenue source for child care programs not participating in *More at Four* and jeopardize their ability to offer high quality child care to younger children. Further, community resources such as Smart Start may be shifted from serving younger children to serving four-year-olds, putting the quality of care for younger children further at risk. This scenario underscores the critical importance of continued study of the issues and of incrementally moving toward a well-informed, integrated system of early childhood care and education.

Another challenge is that the cost of providing an early education experience for four-year-olds that achieves school readiness averages \$7,000 a year or more. The mechanism conceived to date to secure this level of financial support combines *More at Four* funding with other sources of revenue, such as Smart Start, Head Start and child care subsidy. In fact, the *More at Four* legislation requires a local contribution to support the costs of the program. This has proven to be a greater challenge than expected, though, because of the changing State and national economy. With the current economic decline, fewer state and federal dollars are accessible. As resources become more scarce, the willingness and ability of local Smart Start partnerships, school systems, Head Start and child care providers to contribute the matching share of *More at Four* diminishes. If communities choose not to participate for this reason, children will fall through the cracks. Or, without additional dollars, creating a strong pre-K program for four-year-olds will require raiding funds targeted to serving younger children or reducing the quality of early education programs. These forced choices undermine the State's agenda to have children enter school prepared to succeed.

Furthermore, the *More at Four* legislation prohibits *More at Four* funds from supplanting other local, state, or federal expenditures for young children. This requirement aims to ensure that more children are served and to minimize local early childhood programs from using *More at Four* funding to replace existing funds, including programs funded by federal funds (e.g., Title I in public schools and Head Start programs). Availability of other funds to provide the local contribution was assumed. As the State's budget deficit has grown, however, local and state funds to provide that contribution have not always been available. Federal Title I and Head Start dollars were available in a few counties, but in many counties these funds were committed prior to the *More at Four* budget authorization. Additionally, many school systems indicate the need to use Title I monies currently funding pre-k in the K-12 grades due to increasingly high stakes there.

Budget timing exacerbates the issues of local contributions and non-supplant. Even though the Governor issued the Executive Order to expand the *More at Four* Program prior to the start of the school year, the State budget was not passed until the end of September in 2002 (as well as in 2001). For the current fiscal year, even agencies that could provide the local contribution were unsure of their state funding. In addition, many counties were unable to move quickly to implement classrooms prior to receiving their budget allocations. This was especially true for school systems and local Smart Start partnerships. Therefore, in many counties, determining whether allocations could be utilized, providing the required local contributions, and enrolling eligible children could not begin at the start of the school year. Thus, many four-year

olds are receiving only a partial year of an educational pre-K program, which is still preferable to no program at all.

Fostering Collaboration Among Programs

The array of early childhood programs and funding streams in the State serve both distinctive and common purposes and populations of children. Each strives to link its funding, delivery systems, and programming with the other to create a more coordinated system. An important level of collaboration has been reached in North Carolina, at both the state and local levels, but there is a need to continue efforts to foster this collaboration and to ease remaining barriers.

A strength of both *More at Four* and Smart Start, for example, is collaboration across agencies at the state and local levels. Both initiatives require local communities to come together to plan services and find resources. Both initiatives require public schools to participate, with *More at Four* requiring shared leadership between local Smart Start partnerships and the schools.

Many counties have strong inter-agency collaboration; others do not. A strong, county-based inter-agency collaboration appears to be central in how quickly (and to what extent) communities moved to utilize the allocated *More at Four* Pre-K slots. Local Smart Start partnerships often are key in communities that are working well together, affirming Smart Start's success in fulfilling its mandate to establish community infrastructures for early childhood care and education. In some counties, this leadership is being provided by school systems. When local collaboration is absent, no single agency consistently emerges as the barrier to cooperation. Nevertheless, the lack of inter-agency collaboration in some counties is inhibiting optimal implementation of the *More at Four* Pre-K Program, as well as other services. Local leadership is essential in the provision of quality pre-kindergarten opportunities that maximize existing resources.

Providing High-Quality Programs

Research shows that early childhood programs must be high-quality to prepare at-risk children effectively for school. Different early childhood programs, however, rely on distinctive funding streams and have varying mandates regarding program quality, resulting in uneven levels of program quality. Consequently, program standards are not applied consistently among across programs, resulting in children not having the same access to quality across the state. Positive child outcomes, however, depend on the same program components, regardless of what entity delivers the program. If all the State's four-year-olds are going to come to kindergarten prepared to succeed, consistent expectations and program standards are needed to ensure their achievement. Fortunately, research-based standards tied to school success exist in the requirements of the *More at Four* Pre-kindergarten Program.

Another critical challenge is the qualifications of the State's current early childhood workforce. Research has demonstrated that classroom quality is tied to teachers' knowledge and skills. As we move to improve classroom quality and expand the *More at Four* Program, it is essential that North Carolina have a pool of teachers with degrees and licensure in early childhood education. Like many other states, though, North Carolina lacks a pool from which to draw. Relatively few teachers in North Carolina have a Birth – Kindergarten license, the state

already is facing a teacher shortage in K-12, and the teacher preparation system has limited capacity to quickly prepare large numbers of teachers to meet the standards. Even with major infusion of T.E.A.C.H. scholarship dollars to help teachers in the field earn their degrees and licensure and to recruit and prepare more teachers to enter the early childhood field, at least a decade will be needed to create an adequate pool of eligible teachers.

Ensuring Equity for Children Across the State

Finally, issues associated with equity of community resources further exacerbate the challenges of financing early childhood, fostering collaboration and ensuring quality programming. Equalizing the playing field for children most at risk for school failure has been the rationale for creating *More at Four* and many of the strategies embedded in Smart Start. Yet often the children most in need are in communities (counties) where the early childhood workforce has the least education, existing programs are of the lowest quality, and resources for matching funds are the least available. Current funding mechanisms have been neither sufficient nor strategically designed to compensate for these inequities.

Development of the Recommendations

Development of the three recommendations presented herein are based on consideration of North Carolina's existing delivery system for early learning opportunities, the legislative reporting requirements, and the circumstances that challenge the State's ability to provide high quality educational experiences for children from birth to the start of kindergarten. The recommendations are the result of a collaborative problem-solving and decision-making process and are based on twelve action principles:

- Focus on child outcomes
- Support high quality family, health and education services for all children, inclusive of those with special needs, from birth to the start of kindergarten
- Prioritize children at-risk for targeted early childhood programs and services, with access by other families and their children as feasible
- Advance toward universal access to prekindergarten for four-year-old children, with priority given to children at risk of academic failure
- Build on the current *system* of services, seek policy synergies, and seize emergent opportunities
- Strive to create an integrated early childhood system that fosters the school success for all children from birth to the start of kindergarten
- Articulate the resources needed to achieve school readiness for children
- Ensure that families, including those with children who have special needs, can easily understand and access the support and education services they need
- Secure increased program, funding and policy accountability in order to achieve desired outcomes
- Support coordinated provision of comprehensive education and support services
- Use resources more efficiently and effectively
- Make recommendations that will be achievable and capable of advancing a longer-term plan that can be developed within the 2003-2005 biennium

Legislative Requirements

At question is how to build on the State's early learning initiatives in order to ensure that *all* children have the opportunity to be educationally successful and positively contribute to the State's civic and economic viability. The recommendations that follow respond to this question and to requirements outlined by Session Law 2001-424, as amended by Session Law 2002-126. Specifically, the recommendations:

1. Identify and make recommendations on the most efficient and effective use of funds from existing State and local programs providing prekindergarten related care and services, including child care subsidies.
2. Recommend strategies to ensure coordination among the Partnership, *More at Four*, and other prekindergarten programs in addressing the academic and cognitive needs of at-risk preschoolers
3. Recommend how best to explore needed structural changes to Smart Start, *More at Four*, and other related programs, including consolidation, that may be beneficial in encouraging coordination and eliminating duplication of efforts
4. Include a plan and timetable for implementation of the recommendations.
5. Recommend organizational placement and administration of the *More at Four* Prekindergarten Program during its expansion and consider if its long-term placement should be coordinated with possible structural changes to North Carolina's present early care and education system.

The complexity of achieving the desired outcome has been noted. Without a continued emphasis on new strategies for coordination, early childhood programs will continue to be delivered under multiple auspices, operate with varying levels and kinds of regulatory oversight, contend with a complex array of funding mechanisms, and respond to different public and private expectations. Across the nation, an extensive search is underway for solutions to counter this reality that will promote efficient use of resources, ensure program coordination, and make certain that young children are prepared for school. It is important to acknowledge that North Carolina is widely recognized as leading the way in this regard. We believe that implementing these recommendations will provide further evidence of the State's strong leadership on behalf of its youngest citizens.

Recommendation #1

In the 2003-05 biennium, expand the *More at Four* Pre-K Program toward the goal of serving all at-risk four-year-olds.

- A. Continue to locate the *More at Four* Pre-K Program through the 2003-2005 biennium in the Governor's Office, under the current shared governance structure between the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Public Instruction. The program will continue to be chaired by the Secretary of HHS and the Superintendent of Public Instruction, working with the Director of the *More at Four* Program. The program will continue to partner with the North Carolina Partnership for Children.

This structure allows the appropriate agencies the oversight and guidance needed to implement the program most effectively by building on the current system of public

school and private child care programs for four-year-olds. This structure guarantees optimal coordination and collaboration as the program expands.

- B. Expand on current state and local level efforts to coordinate *More at Four* with other early childhood education programs and to leverage and maximize resources for at-risk four-year-olds through these strategies:
- Study the revision of the existing subsidy reimbursement rate for 4- and 5- star child care centers meeting the *More at Four* standards to determine the need for a rate above the 5- star for classrooms meeting the *More at Four* standards. This study should be completed in conjunction with looking at other resources and “layering” of funds. Any recommendation for revision would be implemented only as and if additional funds become available.
 - Work toward adoption of *More at Four* program standards for all of the State’s publicly funded Pre-K programs, including public school, Smart Start, and Head Start programs.
 - Require placement of *More at Four* Pre-K Program representatives on both local Smart Start and the North Carolina Partnership for Children boards.
 - Use the two legislatively required “needs and resources assessments” for Smart Start and *More at Four* that will be conducted by the Department of Health and Human Services and other similar efforts, such as IDEA assessments, to identify any existing gaps in coordination of services at the state and local levels across all programs for four-year-olds and to make future decisions.
 - Provide technical assistance, as resources are available, to communities that need help in coordinating programs and leveraging resources locally for at-risk four-year-olds by using technical assistance teams, composed of representatives with expertise from the *More at Four* state office and local sites, Smart Start state and local partnerships, the Division of Child Development, the Department of Public Instruction, local school systems and Head Start education coordinators to visit and assist those communities.

Technical assistance may also include mentoring relationships between new *More at Four* counties/communities and currently funded sites that have demonstrated excellent collaboration and leveraging of resources.

- Establish a state outreach plan for *More at Four* that will include (1) general outreach and information to communities about pre-kindergarten opportunities, and (2) specific child-find assistance, especially for hard-to-reach families that do not typically use existing services. Targeted and unserved children are often at home with parents and are the most difficult to reach. Strategies for getting information to families need to be developed in conjunction with local communities. Families cannot participate if they do not know about the program, decreasing their child’s likelihood of success in school and increasing the burden on public schools to try to provide belated remediation.

- Study the adjustment of the *More at Four* funding formula to ensure that programs can be expanded in a timely manner, especially in counties with the greatest level of need and the least financial resources.
- Examine the non-supplant clause in the legislation for its impact on maximizing the use and leveraging of other resources.
- Initiate negotiation with the federal Region IV Head Start Office regarding a more formal linking of Head Start and *More at Four* funds. Explore barriers and differences in requirements and clarify for local communities the possibilities in combining these two sources of funding.

Recommendation #2

In the 2003-2005 biennium, maintain the State's commitment to funding early childhood services for all children from birth to the start of kindergarten, with priority on young children who are most at-risk, and to improving the quality of those services. The irrefutable connection between a child's first four years of learning and development and his success as a four- and five- year old learner requires this continued commitment.

- A. Maintain current funding for Smart Start, for services for children with disabilities, and for reducing the child care subsidy waiting list. Expand these services toward full funding, as economically feasible. Integrate Early Head Start (birth to age 3) and Head Start (3s and 4s) with other programs serving these age groups.
- B. Maintain the focus on improving services for children birth to kindergarten by continuing existing strategies and developing new strategies at state and local levels for linking Smart Start, *More at Four*, Head Start, child care subsidies, public school funding, early intervention, EPSDT, Maternal and Child Health, and any applicable DSS funding. Achieve stronger coordination between and among programs by focusing on the best interests of children and their families, encouraging appropriate programmatic flexibility (e.g., in areas such as different eligibility standards, overlapping target populations, and absence of consistent transitional procedures) and maximizing opportunities to leverage funding.

Recommendation # 3

During the 2003-2005 biennium, develop a plan for creating an integrated system that will effectively guide North Carolina's early childhood programs and services for children from birth to the start of kindergarten, as well as the transition to kindergarten. More time is required to solicit input from local service providers and funders and to prepare additional comprehensive and thoughtful recommendations that can ensure all of North Carolina's children enter kindergarten prepared to succeed.

- A. Use the two legislatively required “needs and resources assessments” for Smart Start and *More at Four* that will be conducted by the Department of Health and Human Services, and other similar efforts, such as IDEA assessments, to inform the decision making process about further integration of existing programs and services. The required assessments will provide more timely data for decision making and will help in better understanding both the existing interconnections among North Carolina’s early childhood services and the existing gaps in service delivery.

The needs and resources assessments will be accomplished in two phases: the initial assessment, using existing data, by April 2003, and more in-depth assessment by Spring 2004.

- B. Collect input from local early childhood groups, including *More at Four* Pre-K programs, Local Education Agencies, Local Partnerships for Children, Head Start, private child care providers, local Child Care Resource and Referral agencies, and Local Interagency Coordinating Councils (LICC) and incorporate this input into the development of further recommendations for needed changes in the system.
- C. Support the current collaboration among the *More at Four* Pre-K Program, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Public Instruction, and the North Carolina Partnership for Children in continued planning and development of additional recommendations. This planning process will address remaining gaps in services and unmet needs, as well as the potential for changes in structural and governance relationships in order to further integrate the funding and further improve the coordination and quality of programs and services.

Proposed Timeline

During this time period, the Early Childhood Governance Work Group and advisory committees will continue to meet to study issues, review needs and resources assessment progress and results, and develop recommendations.

April 2003	Complete initial needs and resources assessment utilizing existing data. Report to General Assembly.
Spring 2003 – Spring 2004	Conduct in-depth needs and resources assessment, including a detailed work force study.
April 2004 – May 2004	Review findings of in-depth needs and resources assessment and work force study with various stakeholders and subgroups.
May 2004	Report updated results of needs and resources assessment, including the work force study.

Spring 2004 – Fall 2004

Develop recommendations for creating an integrated system of early care and education, including pre-kindergarten. Review with Governor.

December 2004

Submit final report to General Assembly.

Appendices

Estimates of NC Four-Year-Olds at Risk of School Failure:
Detailed Data

These data provide best estimates of: (1) the **number of four-year-olds** in the State of North Carolina, (2) the **number of at-risk four-year-olds**, (3) the **number of unserved** at-risk four-year olds and (4) the **number of under served** at-risk four-year-olds. There is no single system of data collection for this information. Therefore, information is obtained from various early childhood programs, which is maintained in various forms and with varying degrees of accuracy. For example, some data are actual headcounts. Other data are simply a number reported to an agency, without breaking out children by type of risk factor.

Therefore, a precise number of “unserved” and “underserved” four-year olds is difficult to obtain. The data systems do not collect information in a way that provide for unduplicated counts. Many children are counted in more than one category (e.g., some children receiving subsidy may also be counted in the Head Start Program number). Efforts have been made to “tease out” unduplicated counts where possible based on the best thinking of those working with these programs. In any case, **these numbers are conservative estimates of the number of at-risk children who are “unserved” and “underserved.”**

Definitions:

Unserved – An at-risk four-year old who has never been or is currently not enrolled in an early childhood program. The first priority for *More at Four* is to identify and enroll unserved children.

Under Served – An at-risk four year old who may meet one of several criteria: eligible for subsidy but not receiving it, is in unregulated care, or is in a program that does not meet the *More at Four* Program criteria.

Summary of Data:

Children At Risk of School Failure: 47,745
Children At Risk Unserved: 10,687
Children At Risk Underserved: 13,198

Estimated Number of 4 year olds		
Category	Number of Children	Source of Data and Explanations
1. # 4 year olds in NC	110,862	State Data Center – 2002 projections based on 2000 Census
2. # 4 year olds at risk (Based on poverty only)	44,345	State school Free/Reduced Price Lunch of 40%; also 40% poverty found in School Readiness Study of 2000
3. # 4/5 year olds with disabilities who are not in poverty	3,400	Estimate by DPI staff based on children who are not served in blended programs.
4. Total # At-Risk Four Year Olds	47,745	Low-income and children with disabilities [# 2 + # 3]

**Estimates of Four-Year-Old Children Served by Type of Program
(Duplicate count)**

NOTE. These estimates include children who are likely served in **higher quality** pre-kindergartens or licensed child care centers that at least approximate the *More at Four* Pre-K Program standards. Family child care homes are included in #8, as those numbers cannot be identified and subtracted. However, these facilities are not likely to meet the *More at Four* program standards or staff credentials. Some Head Start children are also included in #8.

Category	Number of Children	Source of Data and Explanations
5. Head Start – estimated number of children in 4- & 5-star centers (based on % programs)	7,138	Div. Child Development Survey, April 2002; estimated # using the % of 4- & 5-star <u>programs</u> in HS as a proxy for % of <u>children</u> . Children are not reported by star level per se.
6. Title I self-contained classes – public schools	7,665	Title I Applications to DPI for 2001-02
7. Title I, disabled, & others in blended classes- public schools	2,702	Title I Applications to DPI for 2001-02
8. Children receiving subsidy in 4 & 5-star licensed facilities	2,955	Div. of Child Development database (includes some Head Start children, as well as those served in family child care homes)
9. Estimate of children with disabilities – <u>not</u> served in other settings	3,400	Estimated # of children with preschool disabilities <u>not</u> served in Title I, Head Start, or via subsidy in child care centers (DPI)
10. Total “Served” Children (likely includes duplicated counts)	23,860	[Sum of # 5 through 9 = 25,802]

11. Estimated # At-Risk children Unserved or Underserved	23,885	[#4 - #10 = 23,885]
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Note. The following estimates include children who are served in a four-year old program, but one **that does not currently meet** or approximate the *More at Four* Pre-K standards.

Estimate of some “Underserved” 4 Year Olds		
12. Children receiving subsidy in 1 to 3-star licensed centers	9,683	Div. of Child Development Subsidy database (includes some Head Start children, as well as those served in family child care homes)
13. Head Start – estimated # in 1- to 3-start licensed centers	3,515	Div. Child Development Survey, April 2002; estimated # using the % of 1- to 3-star <u>programs</u> in HS as a proxy for % of <u>children</u> . Children are not reported by star level per se.
14. Total estimated Underserved Children	13,198	[# 12 + # 13]

15. Total estimated # Unserved	10,678	[#11 - #14]
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More at Four Pre-K Program: Counties Participating and
Number of Child Slots Approved, 2002-03

No.	County Name	Contractor Name	Slots
1	Alamance	Alamance-Burlington School System	102
2	Alexander	Alexander County Partnership for Children	33
3	Alleghany	Alleghany County Schools	18
4	Anson	Union County Community Action, Inc. (Anson)	37
5	Ashe	Ashe County School System	19
6	Avery	Avery County Partnership for Children	18
7	Beaufort	Beaufort County Partnership for Children	88
8	Bertie	Bertie County Schools	40
9	Bladen	(No contract to date)	
10	Brunswick	Brunswick County Partnership for Children, Inc.	62
11	Buncombe	Buncombe County, Smart Start of	63
12	Burke	Burke County Partnership for Children	102
13	Cabarrus	Cabarrus County Partnership for Children	123
14	Caldwell	Caldwell County, Communities in Schools of	58
15	Camden	Camden County Board of Education	18
16	Carteret	Carteret County School System	61
17	Caswell	Caswell County Schools	20
18	Catawba	Catawba County Partnership for Children	95
19	Chatham	Chatham County Partnership for Children	34
20***	Cherokee	Region A Partnership for Children, Inc. (Total 163)	38
21	Chowan	Edenton-Chowan Board of Education (Chowan)	18
22***	Clay	Region A Partnership for Children, Inc. (Total 163)	14
23	Cleveland	Cleveland County Partnership for Children	84
24	Columbus	Columbus County Schools	67
25	Craven	Craven County Board of Education	58

No.	County Name	Contractor Name	Slots
26	Cumberland	Cumberland County Partnership for Children, Inc.	264
27	Currituck	Currituck County Schools	18
28	Dare	(No contract to date)	
29	Davidson	Davidson County Partnership for Children	132
30	Davie	Davie County Schools	20
31	Duplin	Duplin County Schools	65
32	Durham	Durham's Partnership for Children	229
33	Edgecombe	(No contract to date)	
34	Forsyth	Forsyth Early Childhood Partnership, Inc.	259
35	Franklin	(Releasing all slots)	
36	Gaston	Gaston County Schools	177
37	Gates	Gates County Board of Education	10
38***	Graham	Region A Partnership for Children, Inc. (Total 163)	18
39	Granville	Granville County Schools	32
40*	Greene	Lenoir/Greene Partnership for Children (Total 93)	27
41	Guilford	Guilford County Partnership for Children, Inc.	382
42**	Halifax	Halifax-Warren Smart Start Partnership (Total 115)	91
43	Harnett	Harnett County Schools	19
44***	Haywood	Region A Partnership for Children, Inc. (Total 163)	27
45	Henderson	Henderson County Partnership for Children	39
46	Hertford	Hertford County Public Schools	36
47	Hoke	Hoke County Schools	90
48	Hyde	Hyde County Schools	18
49	Iredell	Mooreville Graded School District (Iredell County)	118
50***	Jackson	Region A Partnership for Children, Inc. (Total 163)	10
51	Johnston	Johnston County, Partnership for Children of	96
52	Jones	(No contract to date)	
53	Lee	Lee County Partnership for Children	50
54*	Lenoir	Lenoir/Greene Partnership for Children (Total 93)	66
55	Lincoln	Lincoln & Gaston Counties, Partnership for Children of	54
56***	Macon	Region A Partnership for Children, Inc. (Total 163)	21
57	Madison	(Contract in process)	

No.	County Name	Contractor Name	Slots
58	Martin	Martin County Schools	21
59	McDowell	McDowell County Schools	33
60	Mecklenburg	Mecklenburg Partnership for Children	652
61	Mitchell	Intermountain Children's Services, Inc. (Mitchell)	18
62	Montgomery	Montgomery County Partnership for Children	35
63	Moore	Moore County Schools	45
64	Nash	(Releasing all slots)	
65	New Hanover	New Hanover County Schools	108
66	Northampton	Northampton County Schools	54
67	Onslow	(Releasing all slots)	
68	Orange	Orange County Partnership for Young Children	104
69	Pamlico	Pamlico County Schools	18
70	Pasquotank	(Releasing all slots)	
71	Pender	Pender County Partnership for Children	18
72	Perquimans	Perquimans County Schools	18
73	Person	Person County Partnership for Children	26
74	Pitt	Pitt County Public Schools	143
75	Polk	Polk County Schools	18
76	Randolph	Randolph County Partnership for Children	71
77	Richmond	Richmond County Schools	64
78	Robeson	Robeson County, Public Schools of	248
79	Rockingham	Rockingham County Partnership for Children	76
80	Rowan	Rowan Partnership for Children	58
81	Rutherford	Rutherford County Schools	64
82	Sampson	Sampson County Partnership for Children	90
83	Scotland	Scotland County Schools	54
84	Stanly	Stanly County School System	34
85	Stokes	Stokes County Partnership for Children	28
86	Surry	Surry County School	81
87***	Swain	Region A Partnership for Children, Inc. (Total 163)	35
88	Transylvania	Transylvania County, Smart Start of	9
89	Tyrrell	(No contract to date)	
90	Union	Union County Partnership for Children Inc. (Union) (Total 98)	
90		Union	85
90		Union (non Eng.)	13
91	Vance	Vance County Schools	18

No.	County Name	Contractor Name	Slots
92	Wake	Wake County Smart Start	230
93**	Warren	Halifax-Warren Smart Start Partnership (Total 115)	24
94	Washington	Washington County Schools	25
95	Watauga	Watauga County Schools	18
96	Wayne	Wayne County Partnership for Children, Inc.	143
97	Wilkes	Wilkes County Schools	57
98	Wilson	Wilson County Partnership for Children	90
99	Yadkin	Yadkin County Partnership for Children	25
100	Yancey	Region D Child Care, Inc. (Yancey)	11
Total (As of 12/19/02)			6600

* Lenoir/Greene Multi-County Grant

** Halifax/Warren Multi-County Grant

*** Region A Multi-County Grant

Appendix C

More at Four Pre-K Program: Children Served by County and Type of Setting 2001-02

Grantee	Public School	Private For-profit Center	Private Non-profit Center	Head Start	Public School & Head Start	Public School & Private Non-profit	Public School/ Head Start/ & Private Non-profit	Private For-profit & Non-profit	Public Charter School	Private Non-profit and Other	Other
Alamance	18 (100%)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ashe	15 (100%)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Beaufort	56 (72.7%)	0	0	0	0	21 (27.2%)	0	0	0	0	0
Buncombe	6 (30.0%)	0	0	0	10 (50.0%)	0	0	0	0	0	4 (20.0%)
Carteret	38 (74.5%)	13 (25.5%)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Catawba	56 (100%)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Craven	24 (100%)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cumberland	63 (64.3%)	13 (13.3%)	12 (12.2%)	0	0	0	0	0	0	10 (10.2%)	0

Number of Children in *More at Four* by County and Type of Setting (2001-02)– Page 2

Grantee	Public School	Private For-profit Center	Private Non-profit Center	Head Start	Public School & Head Start	Public School & Private Non-profit	Public School/ Head Start/ & Private Non-profit	Private For-profit & Non-profit	Public Charter School	Private Non-profit and Other	Other
Davidson	74 (83.1%)	0	15 (16.9%)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Forsyth	34 (51.5%)	21 (31.8%)	0	0	0	0	0	0	11 (16.7%)	0	0
Gaston	9 (39.1%)	14 (60.9%)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Granville	17 (100%)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Guilford	54 (45.8%)	0	27 (22.9%)	37 (31.4%)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hertford	10 (47.6%)	0	0	11 (52.4%)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hoke	74 (79.6%)	0	0	0	19 (20.4%)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mecklen-burg	36 (66.7%)	18 (33.3%)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
New Hanover	18 (48.6%)	0	0	19 (51.4%)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Number of Children in *More at Four* by County and Type of Setting (2001-02) – Page 3

Grantee	Public School	Private For-profit Center	Private Non-profit Center	Head Start	Public School & Head Start	Public School & Private Non-profit	Public School/ Head Start/ & Private Non-profit	Private For-profit & Non-profit	Public Charter School	Private Non-profit and Other	Other
Northamp-ton	7 (100%)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Orange	46 (63.0%)	0	7 (9.6%)	0	0	0	20 (27.4%)	0	0	0	0
Pamlico	15 (100%)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Region A*	41 (64.1%)	0	20 (31.3%)	3 (4.7%)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Robeson	43 (68.3%)	20 (31.7%)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Scotland	24 (100%)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Vance	14 (100%)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wake	0	27 (48.2%)	29 (51.8%)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wayne	16 (31.4%)	0	0	17 (33.3%)	0	0	0	18 (35.3%)	0	0	0

* Region A includes: Cherokee, Jackson, Macon, Swain, Haywood, Clay, and Graham Counties

***More at Four* Pre-K Program:
Implementation Status of Legislative Requirements**

This table provides a status report on the legislation requirements for the *More at Four* Pre-kindergarten Program as mandated in Session Law 2001-424, Section 21.76B. This status report was also included in the May 1, 2002 Legislative Report. Updated information is shown in **bold-faced type**.

Sub-Section of Section 21.76B	Status of Implementation
<p>Section 21.76B(a) The Department of Health and Human Services in consultation with the Department of Public Instruction shall develop <i>More at Four</i> Pre-K Program.</p>	<p>A “management team” consisting of designees from the Governor’s Office, the DHHS, and the DPI was formed to oversee the development of the <i>More at Four</i> Pre-Kindergarten Program. The management team also consults with The NC Partnership for Children, Inc. An Interim Director of the program, Dr. Carolyn Cobb, was hired on November 6, 2001. After the Director of the Program was hired, the management team was asked to continue functioning as an advisory group to the <i>More at Four</i> Pre-Kindergarten Program Office. Since that time, this group has been included on the Executive Committee of the <i>More at Four</i> Pre-Kindergarten Program Task Force. (See next Section.)</p>
<p>Section 21.76B.(b) Establish a <i>More at Four</i> Pre-K Task Force to oversee the development & implementation of the pilot program</p>	<p>The Task Force was jointly established by the DHHS and the DPI and is chaired by the Secretary of DHHS and the Superintendent of DPI. It includes representatives of the groups named in this sub-section: early childhood experts from DHHS, DPI, state and local Smart Start partnerships, Head Start programs, parents, teachers certified in early childhood, private for-profit and not-for-profit child care, and other early childhood education experts. Membership also includes representatives from the UNC-General Administration, private universities and colleges, and the N. C. Department of Community Colleges.</p>
<p>Section 21.76B.(c) DHHS & DPI, with guidance from Task Force, shall develop/implement program. Pilot shall be distributed geographically.</p> <p>Program shall be consistent with standards & assessments established jointly by above groups.</p>	<p><u>The <i>More at Four</i> Pre-Kindergarten Initiative Program Guidelines and Requirements</u> document, which was approved by the Task Force and details the requirements to be followed by the local Pre-K sites, is available on the Governor’s web site at www.governor.nc.state.nc. This document was revised in July 2002 based on new policies and recommendations made by the Task Force and the Program Office.</p> <p>In 2001-02, two rounds of competitive applications were held, with grantees first selected based on review team ratings of several aspects of program quality. Additional consideration was given to economic need and geographic distribution of the applicant communities. A total of 28 grants (including 34 counties) comprised the final list of grantees.</p> <p>For 2002-03, the program was expanded to the entire state, adding 6,000 additional slots. Slots were allotted based on percent of poor students (free/reduced price lunch) represented in each county. The amount per slot was based on the NC Department of Public Instruction’s low-wealth formula.</p>

<p>Section 21.76B.(c)(1) and (2) Process for identifying children at risk of academic failure, and children who have never been served...</p>	<p>See <u>Program Guidelines and Requirements</u>, “Identifying and Recruiting At-Risk Children” (pages 6-9). Also see “General Program Operation and Information” Section, page 3-4, which addresses required health screening of Pre-K children, and pages 4-5, which address screening in various developmental domains.</p>
<p>Section 21.76B.(c)(3) Curricula that are recommended by Task Force.</p>	<p>This requirement is addressed in the <u>Program Guidelines and Requirements</u>, pages 12-13. Research-based curricula that address the developmental domains in the legislation and the five domains listed in the Ready for School Goal Team Panel were considered. Recommended curricula currently include: Bright Beginnings, Creative Curriculum, High Scope, Montessori, and Bank Street Explorations. The <i>More at Four</i> Pre-Kindergarten Program Office can review other research-based curricula. That office has established a committee of curriculum experts to conduct such reviews. Several other curricula have been reviewed to date and were not approved as meeting the curriculum standards. However, that does not mean that additional curricular materials cannot be integrated with the core curriculum in a classroom.</p>
<p>Section 21.76B.(c)(4) An emphasis on family involvement.</p>	<p>An emphasis on family involvement is included and can be found in the <u>Program Guidelines and Requirements</u>, page 13.</p>
<p>Section 21.76B.(c)(5) Evaluation of child progress by pre- and post-assessment and ongoing assessment by teachers.</p>	<p>Pre- and Post-assessment of children will be carried out by the outside evaluation starting with the 2002-03 school year. Because children will receive only a partial year of pre-K access this fiscal year, pre-post assessments were not considered to be reliable measures for evaluation purposes or to be cost-effective. Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, the outside evaluator, is collecting child-specific information and survey data from staff and programs during the Spring of 2002. Part of the external evaluation for 2002-03 will be pre- and post-assessments of approximately 200 representatively sampled children who will receive a full year of pre-kindergarten.</p> <p>Ongoing assessment by teachers is addressed in the <u>Program Guidelines and Requirements</u>, page 12 under “Instructional Components and Standards.”</p>
<p>Section 21.76B.(c)(6) Guidelines for reimbursing entities that provide Pre-K programs.</p>	<p>A system of reimbursement for 2001-02 was finalized in conjunction with the DHHS Controller’s Office, with input from DPI and The NC Partnership for Children, Inc. In working with the DHHS Controller’s Office, we determined that the existing child care subsidy system was not feasible for funding stable Pre-Kindergarten programs. The system established is a blend of per student funding and funding for classrooms. Starting with 2002-03 the contracts with sites were changed to “purchase of service” contracts – contracting for a given number of “child slots.” Funding is provided for each slot that has an enrolled child who attends for that month. Reimbursement is based on monthly attendance records. This system resembles the child core subsidy system in it’s per child reimbursement for services rendered. The per-child amount is contracted with the county (or multi-county region), which then subcontracts with individual providers in its region.</p>
<p>Section 21.76B.(c)(7) System built upon existing local school, private child care providers, & other entities with ability to establish or expand Pre-K capacity.</p>	<p>The application and selection of <i>More at Four</i> Pre-K sites is based on existing service delivery providers. The communities selected include classes in public Pre-Kindergartens, Head Start classes, and private for-profit and non-profit state licensed child care providers. [See Appendix C for numbers of child positions by type of setting.]</p>

<p>Section 21.76B.(c)(8) and (9) <u>Quality control system.</u> Providers meet standards/guidelines as established by DHHS, DPI & Task Force. May use child care rating system. <u>Standards for minimum teacher qualifications</u> (licensure)</p>	<p>Requirements for staff (administrators, teachers, and teacher assistants) and for classroom/center licensing are set at a quality program level: public school licensure for teaching staff, AAS certification for assistants (staff may start with lower credentials but have 4 years to reach these standards), and a minimum of 3-star license rating by Division Child Development, DHHS to be accepted as a participant (must reach 4- or 5-star rating within 3 years). [See page <u>Program Guidelines and Requirements</u> for requirements for staff (pages 10-22) and classrooms or sites (page 15). A number of the sites already have teachers who meet the requirements, as specified by this sub-section. Many sites are challenged in finding qualified staff for their pre-kindergarten programs.</p>
<p>Section 21.76B.(c)(10) A local contribution is required</p>	<p>The application sets forth requirements for a local contribution beyond the <i>More at Four</i> Pre-Kindergarten Program funds. Applicants are required to specify what other sources of funding will be used to support the children/classrooms included in the <i>More at Four</i> Pre-Kindergarten Program sites. The intent of this program is to provide, on average, approximately half the costs of a quality program. For the 2002-03 school year, sites will receive between \$320 and \$420 per child per month (based on the Department of Public Instruction’s low-wealth formula).</p>
<p>Section 21.76B.(c)(11) A system of accountability</p>	<p>The <u>Program Guidelines and Requirements</u> address this need in the “Program Standards and Curriculum” Section on pages 6-17. The procedures for fiscal accountability were developed in 2001-02 and are in place. For 2002-03 invoices from contractors are accompanied by enrollment and attendance data. Approval of invoices by the <i>More at Four</i> Pre-Kindergarten Program Office is required for reimbursement by the DHHS Controller’s Office to the local contract administrator. The child-specific database, along with teacher and program databases, were developed in paper form for the Spring 2002 data collection. Web-based data entry began implementation in November 2003 for the 2002-03 school year for the original 28 grants from 2001-02 and will continue to expand as counties and sites come on-line and receive training. The system will include data collection on children served, as well as information about staff, programs, and expenditures.</p> <p>For classrooms in place in the Spring of 2002, classroom ratings by trained evaluators using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R) was conducted in the fall of 2002. The Division of Child Development, DHHS is providing for these special and additional assessments through its contract to provide ECERS-R reviews for licensing. <i>More at Four</i> pre-k classrooms are required to receive a rating of 4.5 by their second year of operation. Those that do not will receive feedback and follow-up from the <i>More at Four</i> Pre-K Program Office.</p>
<p>Section 21.76B.(c)(12) Collaboration with State agencies and other organizations.</p>	<p>As noted above, there has been ongoing collaboration on the development and implementation of this program prior to and continuing with the establishment of the <i>More at Four</i> Pre-Kindergarten Program office among DHHS, DPI, and the NC Partnership for Children. The original Task Force, comprised of even more groups developed the <u>Program Guidelines and Requirements</u>, and provided preliminary assistance with the funding of sites and application requirements. The Executive Committee of the Task Force helps review materials and to make policy/program decisions between Task Force Meeting dates. At the local level, collaboration is required as addressed in the <u>Program Guidelines and Requirements</u>, page 23.</p>
<p>Section 21.76B.(c)(13) Consideration of reallocation of existing funds to maximize use of exiting funding....</p>	<p>See Section 21.76B.(f) below, which addresses this provision more fully and was added in the 2002 Legislative Session.</p>

<p>Section 21.76B.(c)(14) Recommendation for long-term placement and administration of the program.</p>	<p>See Recommendation for this Report to the General Assembly.</p>
<p>Section 21.76B.(d)(1) Contract with an independent research organization...for design of evaluation component.</p>	<p>A contract with the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute (FPGCDI) has been established. FPGCDI is nationally known for its research in early childhood, including Pre-K programs. The evaluation design will include child-specific outcomes (starting in 2002-03), long-term follow-up plans, assessment of how well the programs are able to meet quality standards, and the impact on the existing service delivery system.</p>
<p>Section 21.76B.(d)(2) Develop a system to collect & maintain child-specific information for long-term evaluation of pilot</p>	<p>A child-specific database is part of the ongoing system of accountability. It will facilitate the evaluation of the program, provide the basis for following children into the public school system (interfacing with the Student Information Management System and/or the NC WISE), and provide information on whether the appropriate children are being served. The child-specific database has also been developed to assist in determining contributions to the federal TANF MOE (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families Maintenance of Effort). Refinements will be made as necessary throughout 2002-03. Results from this database will be used by the <i>More at Four</i> Pre-K Office for monitoring and reporting purposes, as well as program evaluation.</p>
<p>Section 21.76B.(e) <i>More at Four</i> Pre-Kindergarten Program funds shall not supplant current state or federal expenditures.</p>	<p>The non-supplant provision is emphasized in the local application and is reviewed as part of the budget provided by the applicant in the selection process. However, as the <i>More at Four</i> Program expands and, especially if it becomes a state-mandated program, this non-supplant provision will need to be removed from the legislation.</p>
<p>Section 21.76B.(f) Recommendations on the most effective & efficient use of funds from existing State and local programs providing Pre-K related care and services... The report shall include recommendations on...coordination between the Partnership, <i>More at Four</i>, and other prekindergarten programs...</p>	<p>See Section VI of this report.</p>
<p>Section 21.76B.(g) Required report due January 1, 2003.</p>	<p>This report constitutes the January 1 2003 Report. Specific data on the <i>More at Four</i> Program specified can be found in Section V and related Appendices. Other Recommendations can be found in Section VI.</p>
<p>Section 10.56.(e) DHHS shall conduct a county-by-county needs & resources assessment...for at-risk four-year-olds....due by April 1, 2003</p>	<p>The <i>More at Four</i> Pre-K Program will provide funding to the DHHS in order to carry out this needs and resources assessment.</p>

Summary of Key Research on Pre-kindergarten:

Participation, Outcomes for Children and Society, and Cost-Effectiveness

Research has focused on various aspects of early childhood education and pre-kindergarten. This synopsis includes three major areas with a brief summary of several studies.

Who Participates in Pre-kindergarten/Early Childhood Programs?

Enrollment rates for 3- to 5- year-olds in early childhood education programs, including center-based care, were higher in 2001 than 1991. Black and White children enroll at higher rates than Hispanic children. Children living in families below the poverty level are **less** likely to participate in center-based education programs than those in income families above the poverty level (47% versus 59% respectively). Children with highly educated mothers are the most likely to participate in such programs. Seventy (70) percent of children whose mothers who had completed college were enrolled in center-based education programs compared to 38% whose mothers had less than a high school degree. This positive relationship is somewhat lower than in 1991, meaning that more mothers with lower education levels are putting their children in center-based education programs (likely due to the emphasis being placed on the impact of these programs for at-risk children at the national and state levels). (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002).

Outcomes of Early Childhood Education Programs for Children and Society

The Impact of Quality

Two major studies have examined the effects of *child care quality* on child outcomes. In the first study, Peisner-Feinberg, et. al. (1999) followed children from the Cost, Quality and Outcomes Study of 1995 into school. Their goal was to examine the long-term effects of variations in child care quality on children's development. A cohort of children who attended community child care centers was followed since 1993, from their next-to-last preschool year through second grade. Key findings include:

- *High quality care is an important element of having all children ready for school.* Children who attended higher quality child care centers performed better on measures of both cognitive skills (math and language abilities) and social skills. This influence of quality was important for children from a wide range of family backgrounds.
- *High quality child care continues to positively predict children's performance well into their school years.* The authors' analyses indicated that the quality of care affected children's development through the end of kindergarten and in many cases through the end of second grade.
- *Children who are at risk of not doing well in school are affected more by the quality of child care experiences than other children.* Children of mothers with lower education levels were more sensitive to the negative effects of poor quality child care and received more benefits – benefits maintained through the second grade.

- *The quality of child care classroom practices was related to children's cognitive development, while the closeness of the child care teacher-child relationship influenced children's social development through the primary grades.*

In the second study, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) Study of Early Child Care followed 1,364 infants born across the country in 1991 to examine the effects of parental and non-parental types of care on children's development. A study reported in 2000 by the NICHD Early Child Care Research Network focused on the relation of child care quality to children's cognitive and language development at 15 months, 2 years, and 3 years. Adjusting for family background effects, the study team found that the overall quality of child care was related to both cognitive and language outcomes at all three ages.

Short and Long-Term Outcomes for Children and Society

A. Smaller, well-controlled studies have the advantage of focusing on and maintaining specific standards and curriculum choices. It is easier to ensure adherence to the program design and intention than in large, publicly funded studies. Two of the better-known studies include the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project and the Abecedarian Study.

1. *The High/Scope Perry Preschool Project.* (Schweinhart, Barnes, & Weikert, 1993). This is perhaps one of the best-known research studies on the effects of preschool participation in a quality program. Studies have followed 123 African American children born in poverty and at high risk of failing in school over time. From 1962-1967, at ages 3 and 4, the subjects were randomly divided into a "program group" who received the high quality preschool program and a comparison group who received none. In this recent phase 95% of the original participants were interviewed at age 27.

- Educational performance. A third more of the program group graduated from high school or received a GED certificate (71% vs. 54%). Earlier in the study, the program group had significantly higher achievement scores at age 14 and literacy scores at age 19 than the no-program group.
- Social responsibility. By age 27, far fewer program group members than no-program members had been arrested five times or more (7% vs. 35%), or had been arrested for drug dealing (7% vs. 25%).
- Commitment to marriage. Although the same percentage (26%) of males in each group were married at the time of the interview, the preschool program males had been married nearly twice as long (6.2 vs. 3.3 years), and far more program females were married than no-program females (40% vs. 8%). Further, preschool program females had about two-thirds as many out-of-wedlock births (57% vs. 83%).
- Earnings and economic status. Four times as many program members earned \$2,000 or more per month (29% vs. 7%); more owned their own homes (36% vs. 13%); and more owned their own cars (30% vs. 13%). Fewer received welfare or other social services at some time as an adult (59% vs. 80%).

2. *The Abecedarian Study.* The Abecedarian Study was a carefully controlled study in which 57 infants from low-income families were randomly assigned to receive early intervention in a high quality child care setting and 54 were in a non-treatment control group. Full-time educational intervention started in infancy and continued through age 5. The children in both group were initially comparable on infant mental and motor tests. But from the age of 18 month

through the child care program, children in the intervention group had significantly higher scores on mental tests than children in the control group.

- Follow-up cognitive assessments at ages 12 and 15 showed the intervention group continued to have higher scores. The gap narrowed but was not eliminated and effect sizes remained moderate.
- The intervention group scored significantly higher on reading and math tests from primary grades through middle adolescence. Reading effect sizes were large; math effect sizes were large to moderate.
- A follow-up study at age 21 found the intervention group had significantly higher mental test scores than untreated controls.
- Both reading and math achievement were higher for individuals with early intervention.
- The intervention group was more likely to still be in school at age 21 (40% compared to 20%). About 35% of the intervention group had either graduated from or were attending a four-year college at the time of follow-up compared to 14% of the control group.
- Social and economic outcomes were also positive for the intervention group. They were one year older when their first child was born compared to the control group. Employment rates were higher (65%) for the intervention group than the control (50%), although the trend was not statistically significant.

B. Large-scale studies. While a number of studies have studied small groups of children who received high quality programs, of particular interest to policy makers and the *More at Four* Pre-K Program are those large-scale funded programs and their impact on outcomes for children. Research and evaluation of publicly funded programs are now beginning to occur and to provide answers to those questions.

3. Head Start. Because Head Start is a large federally funded program begun in the 1960's, it is useful to look at evidence available on that program. Early studies of the federally funded Head Start Program for low-income children found short-lived effects on school performance, as has been true with some other large-scale programs. These studies prompted changes in the program, and changes have been occurring over the last few years. Two studies of Head Start are reviewed here.

The first study conducted by Sherri Odden and others examined findings from a 17-year follow-up of 622 Head Start participants at age 22. The researchers located 77% of the original sample.

- While there were no differences found for some sites, the study found some positive effects on school success and crime for participants. Outcomes for females (but not males) at one site found that more Head Start participants obtained a high school diploma or GED certificate and only one-third as many were arrested.
- One program that used the High/Scope curriculum rather than the standard Head Start curriculum of that time found even stronger effects, again supporting the importance of quality in pre-kindergartens. Participant children had significantly higher grade point averages throughout school and experienced fewer than half as many criminal convictions by age 22. A recent national survey found that 37% of Head Start programs today use the High/Scope curriculum. Again, the emphasis on quality appears to play a key role in outcomes.

The second study is being conducted on a much larger scale. The US Department of Health and Human Services has sponsored a long-term study of students participating in Head Start Programs across the nation. The Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES), begun in Spring 1997, collects data annually on a nationally representative sample of Head Start programs, classrooms, teachers, parents, and children in order to examine the quality and effects of Head Start. While this is not an experimental study, it provides information about the impact and quality of Head Start. The 2000 report (US Department of Health & Human Services) summarized findings under benefits to families, classroom quality, and benefits to children.

- Compared with results from six national research studies, Head Start classrooms have higher quality than most center-based early childhood programs based on ratings on the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised.
- FACES found that most Head Start programs have smaller class sizes and smaller child/adult ratios than required by the HS Performance Standards or the National Association for the Education of Young Children accreditation standards.
- Children whose parents read to them daily had higher vocabulary scores, emphasizing the importance of focusing on meaningful parent involvement and education.
- Head Start classrooms that received higher ratings on specific aspects of program quality (e.g., richer language learning opportunities) had children who performed significantly better on assessment tasks, regardless of their baseline ability.
- Growth of Head Start participants in their following kindergarten year exceeded the growth expected of a typical kindergartner. They showed significant gains in vocabulary, letter recognition, writing, and other pre-reading skills. They performed above the level of other low-income children on a measure of vocabulary.

4. Georgia Universal Preschool Evaluation. Henry, et. al. (2001) reported the fourth-year findings of the longitudinal study of a sample of pre-kindergarten students from 1996-97 (3,639 children). Ninety (90) percent of these students had completed Grade 2 in 1999-2000. While there is no control group for this study (since Georgia has universal pre-k), researchers did statistically control for various background factors of children and families in a number of analyses. Key findings of this fourth-year follow up are:

- During their third year in elementary school (second grade), students gained most in math, science, and language arts. Least change occurred in social behaviors overall (although attitude toward learning and independence increased significantly during the year.)
- Students assigned to Special Instructional Assistance (SIA) – an intervention plan for students who are behind – fell further behind their peers, indicating these services were not effective in reducing academic gaps. This program has recently been replaced through educational reforms passed by the legislature in 2000, including reduced class size for lower performing students.
- Older students significantly out-performed the students who turned four in June, July or August their pre-k year. Students who were barely four when entering pre-K scored about 10 percent behind their peers in math. *These differences were greater for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.* [A review of studies by Stipek (2002)]

- notes that several studies comparing age-at-entry show some advantage for older children in the early grades of school that typically diminish in later years.]
- There was an interesting interaction of teacher credentials and years of experience. While teachers holding a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential with little experience were more effective than certified teachers with little experience, their effectiveness declined as years of experience increased. The same pattern was found for teachers with a degree but no certification. Certified teachers' effectiveness, while initially somewhat lower with little experience, stayed the same and was higher than the other groups with more years of experience. One speculation is that the required continuing professional development for certification helps to maintain effectiveness.
 - *The positive effects of certified teachers were the greatest in pre-K classes with high concentrations of disadvantaged students.*
 - Overall, teachers who believed in child-centered practices out-performed others in pre-k and kindergarten. *Child-centered instructors were significantly more effective in classes with more disadvantaged students, a positive effect that persisted through the second grade.*

Two large-scale, publicly funded studies that were able to construct comparison groups are discussed below.

5. *The Chicago Child-Parent Center Program: Longitudinal follow-up.* The Chicago Longitudinal Study examined the educational and social development of a same-age cohort of low-income, minority children who grew up in high-poverty neighborhoods. The CPC Program was started in 1967 and included several components (half day preschool for one or two years, full or part-day kindergarten, continuing support services in linked elementary schools, and a parent program that provided parent education and resource rooms. Children might participate in only one of these components or all of them. Arthur Reynolds of the University of Wisconsin has been following a same-aged cohort of approximately 1,000 CPC children and a comparison group of children with similar demographics, statistically adjusting for any difference in the two groups over time. In this study (2001), Reynolds, et. al. present findings of a 15-year follow-up.

- Participation in both the preschool and the school-aged interventions were significantly associated with lower rates of retention and placement in special education. However, the impact of preschool provided the primary effects. Preschool participants compared to the control group had significantly lower rates of grade retention (23% vs. 38%) and special education placement (14.4% vs. 24.6%).
- Preschool participants had a significantly higher rate of high school completion at age 20 (49.7% vs. 38.5%). Boys benefited from preschool participation more than girls, especially in reducing the school dropout rate.
- The adjusted arrest rate for the preschool participation group was 16.9% compared to 25.1% for the comparison group. They also had significantly lower rates of multiple arrests and violent arrests.
- The authors state that these findings **“are among the strongest evidence that established programs administered through public schools can promote children’s long-term success.”**

6. Michigan School Readiness Program: State-Funded Preschool Program Works for Children at Risk. The Michigan School Readiness Program (MSRP) was begun in 1985-86 with 694 children and served 25,712 in 2002-03. As in the *More at Four* Pre-K Program, it is designed for four-year-olds at risk of school failure, with low income being the predominant factor that qualifies children. Evaluation was begun under contract to the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation in 1994 and has been ongoing. Recent findings following a cohort of children, compared to a matched control group (classmates of children with similar background that had no program) through Grade 4 (Buch and Schweinhart, 2002) include:

- MSRP classrooms demonstrate high quality based on independent ratings using the *Program Quality Assessment Scale*.
- In kindergarten, MSRP children score higher than non-participants in all areas of child development (initiative, social relations, language and literacy, logic and mathematics, creative representation, and music and movement).
- Cumulative retention rates for the MSRP group were significantly lower than the no-program group at each grade, with the differences becoming larger at each grade, from Grade 1 through Grade 4.
- The MSRP group scored higher in both reading and math on the state assessments than the no-program group at Grade 4. The percent passing both reading and math was 42% for the MSRP group compared to 32% for the control group.

Cost Effectiveness of Preschool Programs

The cost-benefit of pre-kindergarten programs is another type of outcome. However, the importance of return on dollar invested warrants highlighting. The key policy question is: Do program benefits exceed costs? A synopsis of three studies is included here.

1. In the original High/Scope Perry Preschool Project Study that followed children into young adulthood, a return of \$7.00 for every dollar invested was found. That included benefits to the individual and to society in terms of high academic outcomes, fewer negative social outcomes (e.g., arrest rates), and better economic outcomes.

2. Age 21 cost-benefit analysis of the Chicago CPC Program. (Reynolds, et. al., 2001b). This analysis included a sample of 1286 youth who had been CPC participants compared to a control group of 550 non-participants (less than one-fourth had some type of preschool). Results of the cost-benefit analysis indicated that each component of CPC program had economic benefits that exceeded costs. With an average cost per child of \$6,730 (1998 dollars) for 1.5 years of participation, the preschool program generated a total return to society at large of \$47,759 per participant.

- The largest benefit was program participants' increased earnings capacity projected from higher educational attainment.
- Economic benefits of the preschool program to the general public (taxpayers and crime victims), excluding increased earnings capacity, were \$25,771 per participant.
- The largest categories of public benefits were increased tax revenues, criminal justice system savings due to lower rates of arrest, savings on tangible costs for crime victims, and savings on school remedial services. **Overall, \$7.10 was returned to society for**

every dollar invested in preschool. Excluding benefits to participants per se, the benefit-cost ratio for the general public was \$3.83 for each dollar invested and \$2.88 per dollar invested for government savings alone.

The present value of benefits for preschool participation was substantially higher than the benefits for school-age participation in enhanced services; however, there was still a savings. The school-age component provided a societal return of \$4,944 per participant, with a cost of \$2,982 per child for 2 years of participation. The benefit-cost ratio was \$1.66 per dollar invested, with the main benefit for savings on school remedial services. Each component of the program was associated with benefits that exceeded costs.

3. Abecedarian Project. Although a different type of before school intervention that began at birth, the Abecedarian Early Childhood Intervention Project provides additional insight into return of investments in early childhood. This project began in the 1970s with 57 infants from low-income families who were randomly assigned to a high quality child care setting at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center and another 54 infants assigned to a control group that did not receive the same intervention (although some did attend other child care centers). Dr. Steven Barnett, Director of the National Institute of Early Education Research at Rutgers University and Dr. Leonard Massey did the cost-benefit analysis of the Abecedarian Project.

- Children in high quality program are expected to make approximately \$143,000 more over their lifetimes than those who did not participate.
- Mothers of enrolled children can also expect about \$133,000 in greater earnings over their lifetimes.
- School districts can expect to save more than \$11,000 per child due to reduced need for special or remedial education.
- Participants were less likely to smoke than the control group (39% vs. 55%), resulting in greater health benefits.
- Even *children of the participants* are projected to earn more over their lifetimes – nearly \$48,000.
- **Overall, the benefits outweigh the costs by \$4.00 for every dollar invested.** That includes a cost of \$13,000 per participant in 2002 dollars, about twice the cost of Head Start. The researchers conclude that the pay-off would likely be much greater in other communities, especially low-income and high crime neighborhoods. The project was conducted in Chapel Hill, NC, a middle-class community more supportive than most of early education.

Summary

The research cited here suggests positive outcomes for high quality pre-k experiences. It also reinforces the enhanced benefits of intervention for low-income/disadvantaged students that accrue to interventions that start even earlier and continue into the primary grades (e.g., reduced class size). Clearly, the combined effect of multi-year interventions will have the best chance at long-term success for at-risk children. However, the impact of pre-k alone for at-risk children is compelling.

Other suggested lessons are the need to control the quality of the pre-K experience for children. In large-scale publicly funded programs, that presents more of a challenge and one that will confront *More at Four* Pre-K Program. However, these findings also suggest that the criteria and standards that the early childhood experts who helped to develop the *More at Four* standards did, indeed, address key factors found in the research to make a difference in outcomes for children. These factors include a high quality, research-based curriculum; well-trained and licensed teachers (although time is given to meet this standard); an emphasis on family involvement; child-centered approaches; and ongoing professional development. A key to success will be designing technical assistance at the local and state levels to ensure that the local classrooms and sites implement these components well.

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