



Early Learning in North Carolina: Program Descriptions*

**Information provided is a snapshot and not exhaustive of all the services provided*

[NC Department of Public Instruction \(DPI\)](#)

DPI is charged with implementing the state's public school laws for pre-kindergarten through 12th grade public schools at the direction of the State Board of Education and the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

[Office of Early Learning \(OEL\)](#)

OEL includes the NC Early Learning Inventory, the Preschool Exceptional Children's Program, Title I Preschool and the Head Start State Collaboration Office. OEL collaborates, advocates, and provides an equitable and responsive system of supports to ensure NC's children and families are successful contributors in school and life.

[NC Early Learning Inventory Formative Assessment Process](#)

OEL works to ensure that educators have the necessary supports, resources, and technology to implement the North Carolina Early Learning Inventory (ELI) process with fidelity to inform instruction, involve students in their learning, and engage families in their children's education.

The NC ELI is an observation-based formative assessment. Teachers observe during instruction and document students' learning and development within the online portfolio (TS GOLD). Documentation substantiates a child's skill attainment along the developmental progressions. Teachers utilize this information to personalize instruction for students throughout the first 60 school days for all 14 NC ELI developmental progressions. Optional developmental progressions are available, but selections can only be made by school and district administrators.

[Preschool Exceptional Children's Program/Early Learning Network \(ELN\)](#)

NCDPI's Preschool Exceptional Children's Program promotes the development and successful participation of NC's preschool-age children with special needs in a broad range of activities and contexts, including their homes, early learning programs, and communities. Through this program, Local Education Agencies (LEAs) provide special education and related services to eligible children. The program maintains strong collaborations with a variety of partners to facilitate inclusive opportunities for preschoolers with disabilities. ELN, funded by DPI, provides early learning communities with professional development and technical assistance to support preschool children with disabilities and their families.

[Title I Preschool](#)

Title I preschool programs are designed to improve cognitive, health and social-emotional outcomes for eligible children before kindergarten. Although Title I allows preschool programs to serve children from birth up to age five, most NC Title I preschools serve four-year-old children. Title I preschool programs usually follow the school calendar and school day and are staffed with both a licensed teacher and qualified teacher assistant.

[Head Start State Collaboration Office](#)

Head Start Collaboration Offices (HSCOs) facilitate partnerships between Head Start agencies and other state entities that provide services to benefit low-income children and their families. Funded by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), HSCOs exist "to facilitate collaboration among Head Start agencies...and entities that carry out activities designed to benefit low-income children from birth to school entry, and their families." They provide a structure and a process for the Office of Head Start (OHS) to work and partner with state agencies and local entities. Together, these partners work to leverage their common interests around young children and their families to formulate, implement, and improve state and local policy and practices.



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[NC Department of Health and Human Services \(DHHS\)](#)

DHHS manages the delivery of health- and human-related services for all North Carolinians, especially our most vulnerable citizens – children, elderly, disabled and low-income families. DHHS is divided into 30 divisions and offices including the Division of Child Development and Early Education.

[Division of Child Development and Early Education \(DCDEE\)](#)

DCDEE's mission is to ensure the health and safety of children in child care programs, promote quality child care by implementing evidence-based standards, and increase access to quality child care to families and children across NC. To ensure the health and safety of children in child care programs, DCDEE licenses, monitors and provides technical assistance to child care programs, conducts comprehensive criminal background checks with all individuals who work in licensed or regulated child care programs and other social and human services programs, and supports the NC Child Care Commission, which has responsibility to create, amend or repeal rules to implement child care laws

[Subsidized Child Care Assistance \(SCCA\) Program](#)

The Subsidy Services Section administers NC's child care subsidy program through the allocation of child care subsidy funds to all counties in the state. SCCA develops, writes, and interprets policy, as well as provides consultation and guidance to families, child care providers, and staff from community agencies; provides technical assistance and training to local staff regarding regulations and policies; monitors county departments of social services and other local purchasing agencies for compliance with requirements as well as monitors child care providers who receive subsidy.

[Licensing](#)

All child care programs must meet minimum standards for care and are required to meet sanitation, building and fire codes as required by other state agencies. The Star Rated License System recognizes facilities for their voluntary efforts to exceed these minimum standards. Child care consultants are responsible for a caseload of licensed programs in one or more counties and ensure child care regulations are being met conducting annual unannounced site visits to evaluate compliance in areas such as supervision of children, including discipline practices and child/staff ratios and group sizes; health and safety practices; condition of materials and equipment; along with staff education, professional development and ongoing training.

[NC Pre-K Program](#)

The NC Pre-K program is designed to provide high-quality educational experiences to enhance school readiness for eligible four-year-old children. NC Pre-K Program Requirements are designed to ensure that a high-quality pre-kindergarten classroom experience is provided in each local NC Pre-K program and that, to the extent possible, uniformity exists across the state.

NC is one of four states with a Pre-K program that meets all 10 National Institute of Early Education Research Benchmarks (NIEER). Benchmarks include comprehensive early learning and standards; education/licensure requirements for staff, professional development; lower staff/child ratio; screenings and referrals; evidence-based curriculum and formative assessments; monitoring and nutritional requirements.



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Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R)

CCR&R refers to an interrelated set of services to families, child care providers, employers, and communities that facilitate access to early care and education and school-age child care options for families, improve the quality of those child care options, and provide objective information for planning and policy development to the public and private sectors.

The NC Child Care Resource and Referral Council (Child Care Resources, Inc.; Child Care Services Association and Southwestern Child Development Commission) provides management and oversight of the Regional Lead Agencies to ensure the delivery of high quality CCR&R Core Services and access to special initiatives statewide.

The Council partners with DCDEE and the 14 NC CCR&R regions to ensure that families, child care providers, and communities in every county have access to high quality CCR&R services that enable them to recognize, support and access high quality, affordable, child and family-centered early care and education and school-age child care services. CCR&R agencies provide the “core” services of consumer education and referral, professional development and training, technical assistance, data collection and analysis, and public awareness, all of which work to improve children’s access to quality child care and help ensure children have the early experiences they need for their optimal development. CCR&R agencies also deliver “enhanced” CCR&R services which target specific early care and education service provider gaps and needs.

Head Start and Early Head Start

The Office of Head Start (OHS) manages grant funding and oversees local agencies providing Head Start and Early Head Start services. Head Start and Early Head Start promotes the school readiness and development of children birth to five from low-income families through local programs.

Head Start encompasses Head Start preschool programs, which primarily serve 3- and 4-year-old children, and Early Head Start programs for infants, toddlers, and pregnant women. Head Start provides comprehensive services supporting the whole child including early learning, health, and family well-being while engaging parents as partners through center-based child care, home visiting, and child care partnerships.

Head Start services are delivered in NC through 53 agencies, including community action agencies, school districts, and private non-profits, which tailor the federal program to the local needs of families in their service area.

Smart Start

Smart Start’s mission is to advance a high quality, comprehensive, accountable system of care and education for each child beginning with a healthy birth. Smart Start was created in 1993 as an innovative solution to a problem: Children were coming to school unprepared to learn. Policymakers recognized that progress would require tapping into the same innovative spirit that inspired private sector advances, and they established Smart Start as a public/private partnership. Independent, private organizations work in all 100 North Carolina counties through the North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc., and 75 Local Partnerships. The power of Smart Start is that it delivers outcomes by giving communities local control to determine the best approach to achieving them.