



WAKE COUNTY



Smart Start



Building Bright Futures

2021-2022 ANNUAL REPORT

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Letter from Board Chair

This year marks the beginning of our 25th anniversary year. I am proud to lead a team that is building on the legacy of Wake County Smart Start's ingenuity and resilience. As we look back on 2021-22, I am in awe of our ability to respond strategically to the challenges of the pandemic. In the face of the digital divide, we created a special initiative to get families with limited financial resources connected to essential online services. We leveraged our network of trusted partners and placed 225 internet-enabled tablets into the hands of vulnerable families who were facing isolation during a dangerous time.

On a systems-level, we successfully advocated for a 30% pay increase for NC Pre-K teachers at private sites who were being paid less than their public school counterparts, even though they had the same credentials and taught the same material. We have now achieved equitable pay with increased funding from Wake County! We are grateful to have so much support from our County Commissioners.

We also embarked on an important research study on racial bias in preschool classroom discipline. This study, funded by Blue Cross Blue Shield NC Foundation, will provide important insight on how we can create more equitable learning environments for young Black children.

In spite of COVID, our staff increased by 25%. With more staff, we renewed our commitment to family engagement and leadership, including an inspiring webinar series with Moms Rising that empowered parents to be advocates for their children. All this in addition to planning Wake ThreeSchool, a new preschool program to serve low-income three-year-olds – the first of its kind in Wake County.

I am humbled that last fiscal year, **Wake County Smart Start impacted over 40,000 children.** In classrooms and at home – we are transforming the lives of young children. Your support has made it possible. Thank you for paving the path to success for young children and families.

Sherry Heuser

Wake County Smart Start Board Chair

the mission

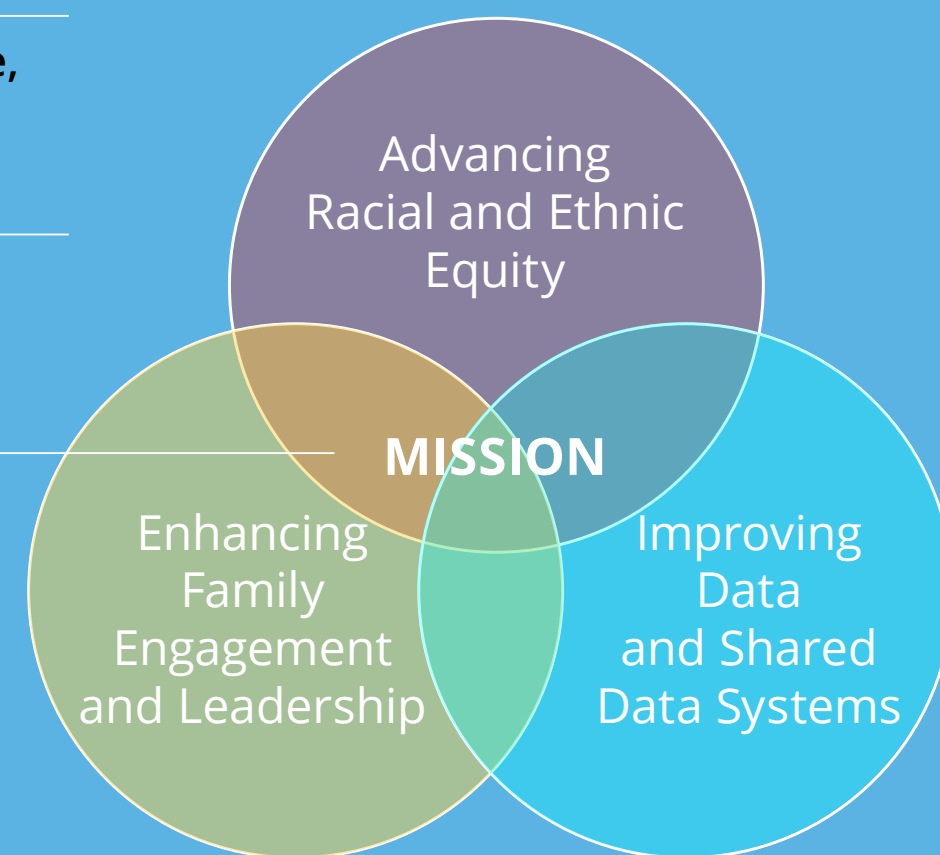
Wake County Smart Start (WCSS) works to ensure that children, birth to five years, are prepared for success in school and in life.

the vision & goals

Wake County will be a community of strong, nurturing families which respects and values its young children and ensures that each child is happy, healthy, and:

1. Children are in safe, supportive home environments.
2. Children are in high-quality care that contributes to positive child outcomes.
3. Children are healthy and developmentally ready for school.
4. Children and families are supported by a strong, diverse, connected and integrated early childhood system that promotes results.

our priorities



the need

All children are born ready to learn, but many do not have access to the experiences and resources that they need to thrive. When children start behind, they stay behind. We can do better by investing in early learning.

- About 1/3 of all 4 year-olds in Wake County are living in poverty.
- 101 million dollars is the estimated price tag for adequately serving all 69,000 children ages 0-5 in Wake County. Currently, the State allocates ONLY 160 million for ALL of North Carolina's early childhood education programs. Our early childhood system is critically underfunded, leaving children and families behind.

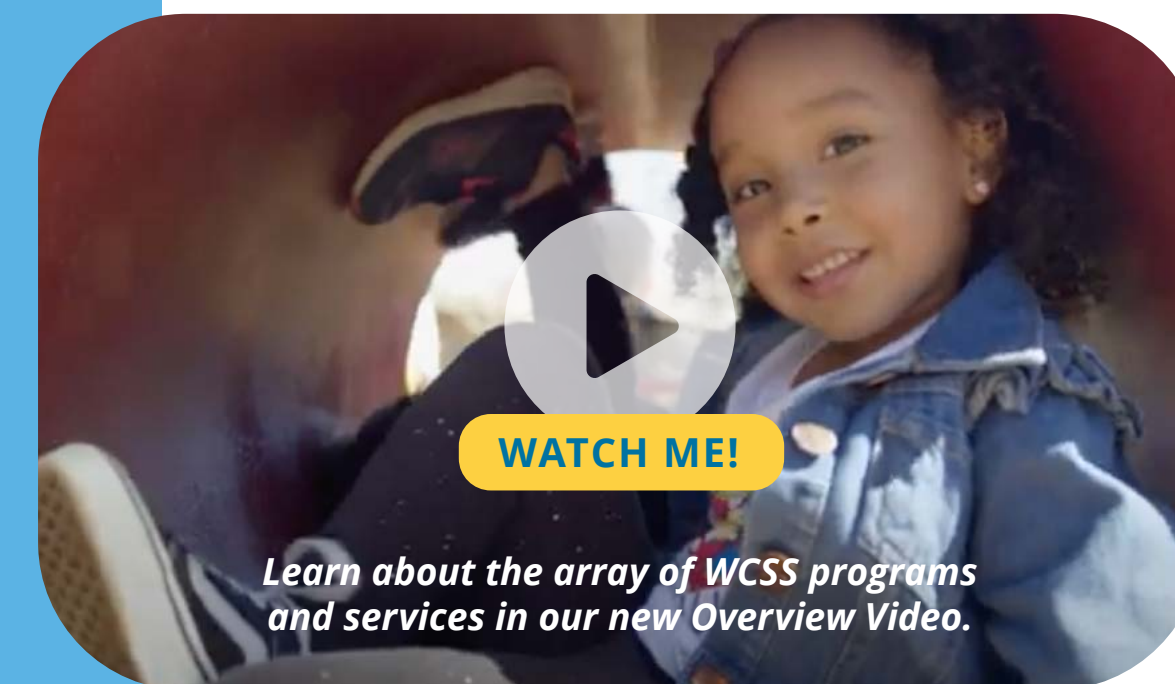
our why

We dream big! We want to create an early childhood educational system where everyone, children, parents and educators, thrive. We know that investing in early childhood has an enormous impact. Reaching children in their earlier years sets them up for a lifetime of better outcomes.

We have the power to lift children out of poverty, create a pipeline for a well-trained workforce, reduce future societal costs and make our county a desired destination for both working families and growing businesses. At Wake County Smart Start, we believe that poverty is not destiny and that every child should be valued. When we come together, we can create a brighter future for all children in Wake.

“Wake County Smart Start is a key partner, has done an excellent job in overseeing that high-quality, early childhood opportunities are available to those children for whom this might be out of reach otherwise. I appreciate that Smart Start is forward thinking and a strong advocate for children and provides strong guidance to child care facilities and families.”

— Anonymous



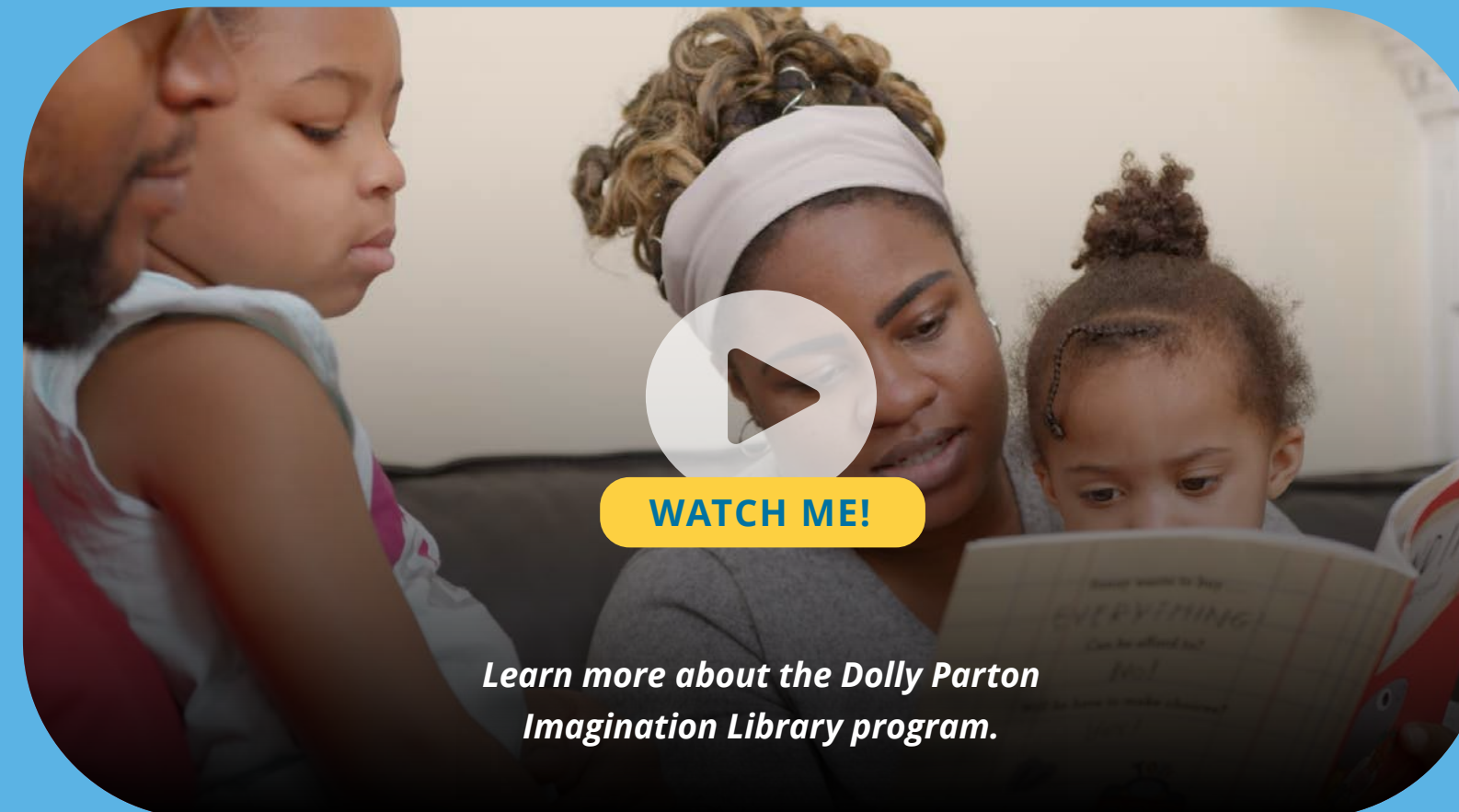
our work

We are the leading early childhood agency helping families access much needed programs, from parenting classes to placements in free, high-quality preschools. We invest in the whole child—ensuring children are emotionally and physically healthy and have support in classrooms and at home. We administer and fund multiple programs that deliver services which improve children's and families' futures. We leverage our connections to make system-wide improvements, including:

- Promoting fairness – ensuring that children from low-income and marginalized households receive equal opportunities to learn.
- Managing free, high quality preschool programs for 3 and 4-year-olds from under-resourced homes.
- Improving the quality of child care centers in our county and supporting higher compensation for early educators at privately owned centers to increase teacher retention.
- Supporting literacy, teaching healthy habits, funding parent education and at home services to ensure that children thrive wherever they are.



WCSS partners with Verizon, Best Baby Zone, and RBC Foundation to provide tablets to under-resourced families so they can access essential online resources.



Learn more about the Dolly Parton Imagination Library program.

2021-22 at a glance

290



Families received services at home to promote developmental growth and well-being of young children.

1,274



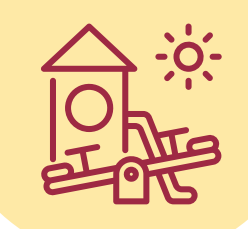
4-year-olds were enrolled in free, high-quality pre-k.

763



Families received case management, mental health or referral services to help their families succeed.

78%



Child care facilities in Wake County benefited from our programs.

300



Families participated in parent support groups or classes.

42

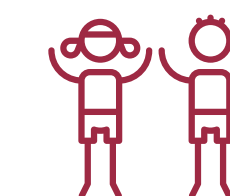


Trainings were conducted for early child educators to improve teachers' knowledge and ultimately increase overall child care quality.

48



Community outreach events met low-income families where they are to promote early childhood literacy, education and other programs.



Wake County Smart Start **impacted over 40,000 children** in fiscal year 2021-22.

Roxely

GROUP PARTICIPANT CRIANZA CON CARIÑO, FUNDED PARTNER

Roxely, young mother of two children, Kaitlyn (2) and Liam (4 mos.), was referred to Crianza con Cariño by a social worker from Wake County Human Services through Wake County Smart Start's intake and referral program, Wake Connections. Two years ago, she lost custody of her daughter and spent time in prison. Once released, the Judge ordered Roxely to take parenting classes to regain custody. It was then that she began the parenting class at Crianza con Cariño. At first, Roxely wasn't allowed contact with her daughter. However, as Roxely progressed with the Crianza con Cariño classes, she showed positive changes in her parenting skills. Soon afterwards, Roxely was authorized to bring Kaitlyn to her house one day a week and then on the weekends. At last, on December 6, 2021, Roxely got her daughter back full time – reuniting the family in time for the holidays.

“In Crianza con Cariño I not only learned about child rearing, child development, empathy, positive discipline, and parenting roles, but I also learned how to provide my children with a safe home where all the members of our family learned to take care of ourselves and others. I am grateful to the Crianza group, the moms, the teacher, and the assistant; all of them have helped me to grow as a mother, to value myself as a woman, and to feel more self-confident. Crianza has changed my life, and most importantly, it helped me get my little daughter back.”

— Roxely (Crianza con Cariño participant)



Angel

GROUP PARTICIPANT PROGRAM FOR EARLY PARENT SUPPORT, FUNDED PARTNER

Angel recently moved to Raleigh and was referred to Program for Early Parent Support (PEPS) through Wake Connections, a Wake County Smart Start intake program. Both of Angel's parents were deceased, and her sister lives across the country in California, so she had a very limited support system when she became a parent. In her initial interview, she expressed feelings of isolation, lack of confidence in her parenting, and having no friends.

PEPS helped her find support. She learned how to ask for help and how to open up more with others. She even sought support for her partner who was experiencing postpartum depression. Angel participated actively in her group and made great strides.

“[the group was] extremely helpful just for learning about being a parent in general. My group leaders were on point with sharing local resources and finding me help when I needed it.”

— Angel (PEPS participant)



Liliana

PARTICIPANT, HOME VISITOR PROGRAM
PARENTS AS TEACHERS, FUNDED PARTNER



Watch Liliana speak about how parent educator, Paulette West, from the Parents as Teachers home visiting program, made an impact on her life.



Kirsten

MOTHER, NC PRE-K PROGRAM

Two of Kirsten's three children have gone through the free NC Pre-K program. When Kirsten discovered NC Pre-K, she was a single mom, trying to make ends meet, with the majority of her paycheck going to child care. She was thrilled to find a free, early education program that taught her boys skills like early math, phonics, and socialization—skills they would need to start Kindergarten. Also, knowing her kids were in a safe, high-quality program gave her the time and peace of mind to focus on starting her own business. Kirsten is grateful such a program exists and is thrilled the kids are exposed to different cultures, music, food, and more. Because Kirsten is such an excellent NC Pre-K spokesperson, WCSS asked her to advocate at the legislative building for The Leandro Plan, which, if passed, would provide significant funding for Pre-K and other early childhood services across North Carolina.



"The NC Pre-K program, which is public and free of charge, has been a great steppingstone for both [my] sons. [Also, it] opened up doors for me to open my own business. I know from the hours from 8 am - 3:30 pm my children are safe, and they are learning. You actually see your child grow. They will teach you some things you didn't know so you'll actually grow together. And it's a really great program to get them started for the next level of school."

— Kirsten (NC Pre-K parent)

partner organization funding process

Every three years WCSS evaluates community needs and selects local partner organizations to fund that will provide much-needed services. Some services are provided through community organizations, others are provided directly by WCSS. All programs and services are carefully monitored and evaluated. Our Board of Directors makes allocation decisions using a set of criteria focused on greatest needs and informed by a racial equity lens. The WCSS Strategic Plan outlines priorities for each funding cycle.



Partner organizations, Dorcas Ministries and WakeMed help distribute tablets to families with limited financial resources.

Collaborative Projects

- Digital Access Project
- Hunt Institute’s Local Data-Informed Strategic Planning Cohort for Wake County
- Preschool Development Grant (PDG) Family Engagement and Leadership
- Technical Assistance Collaborative
- Transition to Kindergarten Committee
- UNC Exclusionary Discipline Study
- Wake County Cooperative Extension
- Wake Pre-K Collaboartive
- Wake ThreeSchool Advisory Committee

Healthy Initiatives

- Preventing Obesity by Design (POD)
- Healthy Starts for Infants & Toddlers
- Natural Learning Initiative

Funded Partners

- CATHOLIC CHARITIES OF THE DIOCESE OF RALEIGH**
 - Language is the Key
 - School Readiness Services for Hispanic Children & Families
- CHILD CARE SERVICES ASSOCIATION**
 - Advancing School Readiness
 - Improving Access to the Early Care and Education System for Latinx Families
- FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER SOUTH ATLANTIC**
 - Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY)
- FIESTA CRISTIANA UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**
 - Building Family Support
- HOPE SERVICES**
 - Hope at Home

“I want to share with you that [taking] effective parenting classes helped me, and they continue to help me because I feel like a useful mother. Before I was not so good. I learned to lose my fear and value my children more, understand them and help them in moments that they need [me] the most. I also learned that I’m not a bad mom when I can’t give them everything they ask for. You have to learn to say ‘no’ sometimes. I learned to value myself as a woman.”

— Magdalena, participant in Building Family Support Program, Fiesta Cristiana



- LUCY DANIELS CENTER**
 - SecurePath
- PASSAGE HOME**
 - Resilience, Empowerment, Access for Children Experiencing Homelessness (REACH)
- SAFECHILD**
 - Crianza con Cariño
- TRIANGLE AREA PARENTING SUPPORT**
 - Program for Early Parent Support
- WAKE COUNTY HUMAN SERVICES**
 - Child Care Health Consultant
 - Child Care Subsidy
 - Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP)

- WAKE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM - OFFICE OF EARLY LEARNING**
 - Parents as Teachers (PAT)
- WAKE COUNTY SMART START**
 - Early Literacy Initiatives
 - Improving and Sustaining Quality Child Care
 - NC Pre-Kindergarten
 - Program Coordination & Evaluation (PCE)
 - Systems Improvement and Public Engagement (SIPE)

finances

Wake County Smart Start Revenue FY 21/22

TOTAL \$24,614,579*

*Includes \$4,983,458 of pass-through funds, Child Care Subsidy

NCPC, Smart Start and MAC**\$7,631,680**

Smart Start funds, Child Care Subsidy
(through Wake County Human Services)**\$4,983,458**

DC Division of Child Development
and Early Education, NC PreK funding**\$9,462,177**

Wake County (PreK and Wake ThreeSchool)**\$2,038,028**

Donations and Other Unrestricted Funds**\$499,236**

Wake County Smart Start Functional Expenditures FY 21/22

TOTAL \$24,180,904

NC PreKindergarten**\$13,719,622**

Child Care and Education Quality**\$585,743**

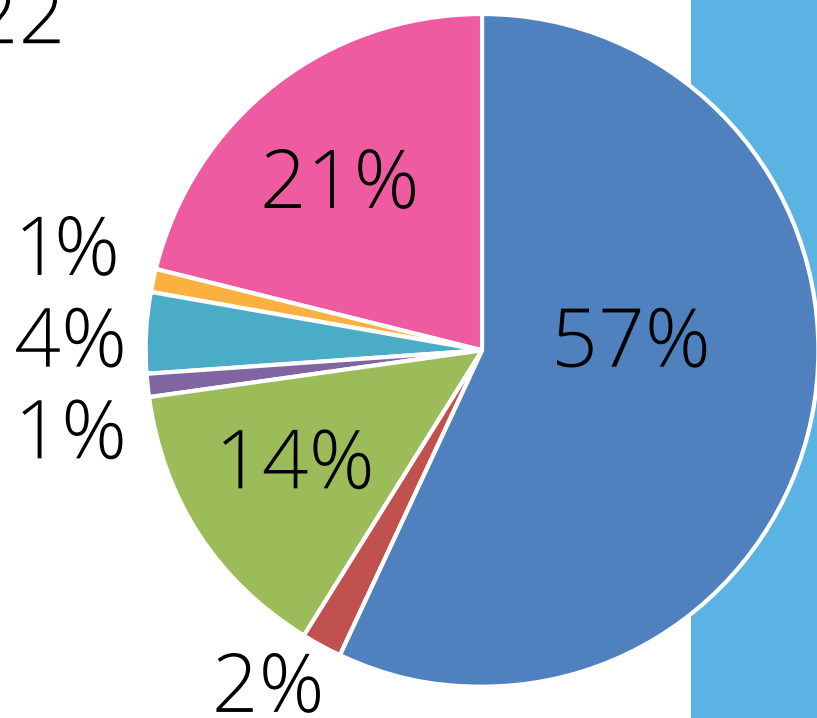
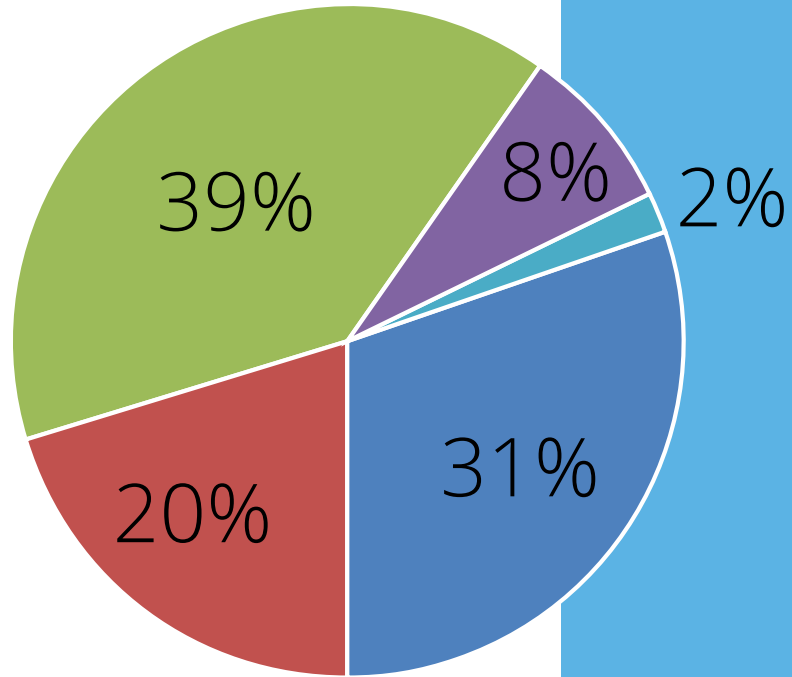
Family Support/Health and Safety**\$3,495,809**

Program Coordination and Evaluation**\$240,849**

Administration - Management/General**\$1,031,143**

Administration - Fundraising**\$124,280**

Child Care Subsidy
(through Wake County Human Services)**\$4,983,458**



WCSS staff and Board attend an early care and education roundtable hosted by North Carolina Partnership for Children and The Hunt Institute with leaders from The White House and the U.S. Department of Education.



Congresswoman Deborah Ross visits Little Hands N Feet Child Care Center for an Early Childhood Tour and Roundtable.



Gayle Headen, WCSS Executive Director, and NC Pre-K parent, Kirsten Bankhead, advocate for lawmakers to fully fund Leandro, which would provide a sound, basic education for all children in North Carolina.



"As an NC Pre-K teacher at a private site, this increase in pay for me means I can support my family. I don't have to decide which bill I need to pay this month. I don't have to be consistently behind on my electric bill. I don't have to borrow money from family and friends or take out a loan, putting me deeper in debt. I can save and be in a better position to help my son attend college."

— Tawanna Terry, NC Pre-K Teacher

together, we go far

For the past 25 years, *partnerships and progress* have been at the core of our work. We hope this report conveys our wide network of early education partners and the impact we're making together in Wake County.

There's an old African proverb – "if you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." Together, we are creating a community where children learn, parents are supported and educators succeed.

We invite you to join us at our 25th Anniversary Gala, *Building Bright Futures: Celebrating Partnerships and Progress*, at the Raleigh Convention Center on Saturday, May 13, 2023. Together, we will gather to celebrate our work and hear a special keynote by Sonia Manzano, Maria on Sesame Street for 44 years. For more information and tickets visit www.givebutter.com/brightfutures.

Please consider making a donation to Wake County Smart Start so we can continue to help children, birth to age 5, access programs and services they need to thrive. To donate, visit www.wakesmartstart.org/donate.



donors

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Jeffrey Adams
Richard Adelman, MD
Christine Alvarado
AmazonSmile Foundation
Anonymous Donors
ArtzHub

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Cynthia Ball & David Aspnes
Bank of America Charitable Foundation
Phyllis Barbour
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Debrah Bell
Judy Blount
Cassandra Brooks

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Cisco
Nikia Coates
Dale Cousins
Veronica Creech
Matthew Crotty
L'Teisha Curtis

D

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Lucy C. Daniels
Alejandra and Michael Dlott
Ann Marie Dlott
Pam & Robert Dowdy
Heather Drennan
Duke Energy Foundation

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Pablo Escobar
Susan Evans

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Karen Gallagher
Meagan and Grant Gill
Matthew Glova
Judy Godwin
Good Monsters
GoodCoin Foundation
Gupton Family Trust

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David & Kella Hatcher
Gayle E. Headen
Shirley Herndon
Sherry Heuser
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IAT Insurance Group, Inc.
Irregular Time Childcare Center, LLC

J

Joe John
John Rex Endowment

K

Nicole Kamunga Mesu
Tonya Kangkolo
Thomas and Deborah Keefe
Donna Kelly
James Knott
Charles Kronberg

L

Lifetime Asset Management

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Arletta Marshall
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Ryan McAward
Sabrina McKennies
McKim & Creed
Kerry and Joanne Miller
Catty Q. Moore
Barbara Morales Burke
NeoGame, SA
North Carolina Partnership for Children
North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Child Development and Early Education
Barbara Nyman

P

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Hurst Webb
Angie C. Welsh
Joe R. White
Taufhua Wilkinson
Katherine Williams
Ronald Williams
Tyrone Williamson
Chris Woodling



MILESTONE: Since the program inception in Wake County, over **1 million free books** were sent out to the nearly 38,000 children enrolled in Dolly Parton's Imagination Library.



participate

Volunteers

A
Nidhi Alberti
Angela Alger-Walker
Sheila Arias
Dinah Arthur
Cynthia Avila
B
Sandi Bailey
Tonya Baldwin
Kirsten Bankhead
Krista Barbour
Connie Batten
Linda Bauer
Beatriz Baumann-Chacon
Jacquie Biehl
Deanna Bledsoe
Nicole Boone
Cassandra Brook
Nicole Butters

C
Bridggette Campbell
Ana Carlos
Jessica Carter
Gerrica Clark
Ana Claros
Anne Clemmons
Gloria Cook
Governor Roy Cooper
Nilda Cosco
Dale Cousins
Dolores Cruz
Rocio Cuevas
D
Dawn Dawson
Carolina Dela Sosa
Gladys D'Estefano
Pam Dowdy

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Michelle Ezzell
F
Maty Ferrer Hoppmann
Anna Fincher
Jennifer Flores
Marta Forbes
Wanda Fowler
Toni Fuller
Corrine Fulp
G
Ana Gallo
Laura Goulian
Krystal Grady
Jevonica Greenwood
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Nicole Hadad
Khalenda Hailey
Gladys Hairston
Shannel Hall
Katina Hanks
Laura Harris
Tamara Harrison
Holli Hemby
Ana Maria Hernandez
Kyetta Herring
Michele Hirsh
Latasha Hopkins
Lisa Horton-Burt
Caroline Hundley
Katherine Hutchens

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Gaby Iduate
J
Robin Johnson
K
Chrysanthé Kennedy
Connie Kennedy
Reshawn King
Kim Knight
Amanda Kowski
L
Shirley Lacy
Zineb Lamkies
Niki Leonard
Elizabeth Lester
Mashea Lewis-Gould
Emani Lindsay
Diana Lloyd
Michele Lorio
Danielle Lyons
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Caren Maloy
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Cindy McDaniel
Paula McGee
Stephany Mejia
Christina Mercer
Beth Messersmith
Lison Miller
Nichole Miller
Charmaine Mills
Scott Moore
Nicole Mora

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Georgiana Nderitu
Maria Nelson
Jack Nichols
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Liliana Perez
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Karen Ray
Pam Ray
Sacnite Razo
Kia Reid
Monica Richardson
Tai Rochelle
Kimberly Roney
Sara Rubin
Tiffany Russell

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Susan Schiewe
Asia Schmidt
Stephannie Senegal
Kim Shaw
LeAnne Simpkins
Dauline Singletary
Tashonda Smith
Nikia Soranyi
Adam Sproles
Aviva Starr
Hershey Stephens
Cheryl Stephenson
Amisha Stewart
Jill Straight
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Jenna Tarleton
Lisa Terry
Tawanna Terry
Christy Thalheimer
Florianna J. Thompson
Lidia Tiller
Laura Tirado
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Alika Vail
Tonya Venable

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Erin Wells
Jacqueline Wenzel
Claudette West
Shamequa Wilkerson-Harris
Kim Wimberly
Shannon White
Shantel White
Antoinette Williams
Beverly Williams
Z
Jahaziel Zavaleta



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Taty Padilla
Nancy Peck
Melissa Peguero-Radice
Lynn Policastro
Denise Rossi
Alex Setzer
Gina Soceanu
Taushau Wilkinson
Taylor Young



WCSS staff enjoys an escape room team-building activity.



Outreach team members promote the Dolly Parton Imagination Library Program at Marbles Museum "Kickoff to Kindergarten" event.



2021-22 Board of Directors

Christine Alvarado
East Coast Migrant Head Start Project
Maria Cervania
Wake County Board of Commissioners
Nikia Coates
PNC Financial Services
Dale Cousins
Community Volunteer
Veronica Creech
St. Augustines University
L'Teisha Curtis
Telamon Corp., NC Head Start
Heather Drennan
Wake County
Susan Evans
Wake County Board of Commissioners

Matthew Glova
Lifetime Asset Management
Elizabeth Hamner
SAS
Sherry Heuser
Capability Company
Leslie Ann Jackson
NC Community Foundation
Tonya Kangkolo
Blue Ridge Daycare
Katie King
Wake Family Law Group
Catherine Lassiter
Wake Technical Community College
Sharon Loza
NC Infant-Toddler Program/ NC Div. of Public Health
Barbara Morales Burke
Foundation for Health Leadership & Innovation

Catty Q. Moore
Wake County Public School System
Antonia Pedroza
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A Safe Place Child Enrichment Ctr.
Charlotte Turpin
Community Volunteer
Michael Wasilick
Wake County Public Library
Angie Welsh
Kaleidoscope Project
Joe White
NCSU Libraries
Katherine Williams
NC Cooperative Extension/ Wake County Center



CBS 17 films at A Safe Place Child Enrichment Center.



Commissioner Susan Evans visits Frankie Lemmon School & Developmental Center.