



Smart Start and More at Four in Durham County Background and Recommendations to Enhance Coordination



Background

Smart Start:

Smart Start is North Carolina's nationally recognized and award-winning early childhood initiative started in 1993 and is designed to ensure that young children enter school healthy and ready to succeed. Smart Start advances a high quality, comprehensive, accountable system of care and education for children from birth to five.

- A public-private initiative that provides early education funding to all of North Carolina. Currently, 78 local partnerships (county- based, with some partnerships incorporating multiple counties) administer funding and programs in all 100 counties.
- Funds are administered locally through local nonprofit organizations called Local Partnerships.
- The North Carolina Partnership for Children (NCPC) is the statewide nonprofit organization that provides oversight and technical assistance for local partnerships. Services at the local level are driven by local needs. Funding for Smart Start is currently \$203.6 million in state funds. Smart Start has raised more than \$257 million in donations and grants since it began.
- Funds are used to improve the quality of child care, make child care more affordable and accessible, provide access to health services and offer family support. Smart Start has achieved tremendous results in these areas and continues to strive to reach all children in North Carolina.
- A local match and funding of 10% is required for Smart Start funding. In Durham County, our match funds for Smart Start funding always exceed the required match.
- Accountability to the taxpayers of North Carolina is of the highest priority. Each year since its inception, Smart Start takes an annual snapshot of all counties in North Carolina and reports on the state of young children's health and education using independent data from all 100 counties. These performance standards known as the PBIS inform our local Smart Start (DPfC) and the state about the areas in which children are doing well, level of services provided and areas that need attention.

More at Four Pre-K (MAF):

MAF provides a high-quality pre-kindergarten experience for at-risk four-year-olds. The More at Four Pre-Kindergarten Program is a high-quality pre-k program that serves low income children who are at risk and prepares them for success in school. Pre-kindergarten is a research-proven strategy to increase school readiness. Children served by More at Four attend a full school day, full school year program that meets high-quality state standards. The program is community-based and is integrated with other early childhood programs in the community and administered at the county or regional level. Children participating in More at Four may be served in classrooms in the public schools, licensed child care centers or Head Start programs. More at Four is especially beneficial for those children most at risk of school failure. According to independent evaluation findings by the FPG Child Development Institute, UNC-CH, children served by More at Four exhibit substantial growth in key areas including language, literacy, math and social skills.

North Carolina is one of the top two states nationally for state pre-kindergarten quality standards, according to the National Institute for Early Education Research, including standards such as teacher education and training, class size, staff-child ratio, and early learning standards. Children's experiences in More at Four are rooted in NC's early learning standards for preschoolers, called *Foundations*. These standards incorporate the five domains of development and learning fundamental to school readiness: approaches to learning, emotional and social development, health and physical development, language development and communication, and cognitive development. More at Four teachers engage children in active learning with a focus on each domain.

Why are Both Programs Necessary?

- More at Four and Smart Start are not duplicative efforts, but have distinct functions within the early care and education system. The administrative, technical assistance and professional support functions and structures for both More at Four and Smart Start are unique. They are complementary, as are other early childhood care services in the state (such as the Division of Child Development in DHHS), but combining them does not reduce the need for staff. If staffs are cut in the false hope of saving money, programs and services will be negatively impacted in both Smart Start and More at Four.
- Durham's Partnership for Children administers both the Smart Start grants and purchase services contract for More at Four. They are intricately linked at the local level.
- More at Four and Smart Start coordinate and collaborate effectively in multiple ways at the state and local level. More at Four was built on efficiency by building on the existing service delivery system at the local level, allowing the local communities to decide on the best administrative agency and where quality services can be provided. In the majority of counties, the administrative agent is the school district; in others it is the Smart Start; and in a handful it is Head Start or a non-profit agency. The decision is locally made by a More at Four Committee (chaired by the Superintendent and the Smart Start Board chair).
- Smart Start and More at Four require a high level of community buy-in, investment and collaboration from members of the local chamber of commerce; universities; business and civic leaders; local elected officials; family members and concerned citizens who are involved in making choices with tax payer dollars that will benefit our community for years to come.

A model that works: Durham County, NC

- Smart Start programming, family support and health programs implement a system of care for the birth to 5 age group that addresses the needs of children and families (for example, early intervention, health insurance). The programs complement each other. Funds are maximized to provide children with quality Pre-K/childcare and services.
- Local match for Smart Start requires communities to be invested and engaged in Smart Start programming. **Durham always provides more than the required match.**
- Nearly twenty activities are funded by Smart Start dollars in Durham County. These programs serve the birth- to- 5 populations. **More at Four children need these services as well.** Programs provide nutritional information; mental health screening and referral; parent education and referral and projects that enhance the quality of care for children.
- The Partnership administers More at Four in collaboration with the public schools, Head Start, private child care providers and the community. An advisory committee meets to provide informed recommendations to the Partnership Board.
- Durham County has placed emphasis on early childhood education with Smart Start and More at Four efforts with more than half of children in the highest levels of child care (4 and 5 star state rated programs). Quality care and school readiness make a difference in long-term results for children and for our state's viability.