



WHITE PAPER

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The Need for Expansion of Pre-K Through More at Four in Durham County

Durham's Partnership for Children,
a Smart Start Initiative



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Introduction

More at Four (MAF) is North Carolina's state-funded pre-kindergarten program designed to prepare at-risk four-year-olds for school by serving them in a high quality environment. Without this opportunity, most of the young children served by More at Four would enter kindergarten lagging behind their peers.

Statewide, the More at Four Program is serving almost 20,000 young children (January 16, 2007). The program is available in all 100 counties. Children served have factors that put them at risk for school failure, with family income as the primary risk factor. In addition, many of these children would not have access to high quality early education without the More at Four Program. Fifty-nine percent of the children enrolled in More at Four this year had never been served in any preschool or child care setting.

Research studies have repeatedly shown that children in the MAF Program exhibited substantial developmental growth (including the most recent study in 2005-2006 by the Frank Porter Graham

Child Development Institute at UNC-Chapel Hill).¹ The researchers (Peisner-Feinberg and Schaaf, 2006) state that their findings are consistent with a number of other large-scale studies that have found that pre-k participation in programs like MAF was associated with "sustained gains in language/literacy, math and social skills as well as greater gains for children at greater risk."

More at Four is designed to be a collaboration among state and local entities. The MAF state funding represents approximately 40% of the needed funding for full-day, high quality early education. The intent is for programs to leverage resources within their communities. As a result, More at Four is offered in collaboration with Smart Start, public schools, Head Start, private child care sites and other local partners. While the state has increased the number of More at Four slots it will fund, counties are challenged to find the matching funds necessary to expand this important program.

Background

The Benefits of High Quality Pre-Kindergarten

Child Development

- Research on early childhood brain development suggests that there are optimal periods of opportunity – "prime times" during which the brain is particularly efficient at specific types of learning. The 48th month of human development is one of those "prime times."
- Numerous studies have shown that how humans develop and learn depends critically and continually on the interplay between an individual's genetic endowment and the nutrition, surroundings, care, stimulation, and teaching that are provided or withheld.² The elements of More at Four accelerate the nutritional, educational, and positive situational experiences of young children.
- More at Four primarily targets those children who have identified risk factors. Most often those factors relate to poverty; for chil-

dren growing up in poverty, economic deprivation affects their nutrition, their access to medical care, the safety and predictability of their physical environment, the level of family stress, and the quality and continuity of their day-to-day care. All of these factors, as the research has shown, have literal deleterious effects upon the development of a young child's brain.

- Well-designed programs, such as More at Four, promote healthy cognitive, emotional, and social development; these "advantages" can improve the prospects – and the quality of life – of many children, including their ability to succeed in the traditional K-12 world. Clearly, the efficacy of early intervention has been demonstrated and replicated in diverse communities across the nation.

Educational Success

James Heckman, Nobel Laureate and economist from the University of Chicago, along with associate researcher Masterov make the case for the strong association between quality early childhood education and long-term educational success. Research shows that when children start school behind they stay behind. Quality early education programs give them the social, language and numbers skills they need; they prepare children, especially at-risk children, for school. Early education provides children with the tools to start kindergarten ready to learn; therefore, they do better throughout school.

While most parents understand that learning begins long before school does, too many parents, grand-

parents and caregivers do not know how to support early learning. They need to understand that children are learning during everyday moments — doing everyday activities. The concept of “catch-up” is deeply imbued in the American psyche, however, the facts are that by the time children enter kindergarten, there is a gap between those with quality early learning experiences and those without. That turns into an achievement gap by third grade. Unfortunately, most children never catch up.³ A program like More at Four provides the accelerant for at-risk children to be propelled into the education mainstream to start at or close to where all the other children are at, and to stay there throughout the educational experience.

“Learning and motivation are dynamic cumulative processes. Skill begets skill; learning begets learning. Early disadvantage, if left untouched, leads to academic and social difficulties later in life. Early advantages accumulate, just as early disadvantages do.”⁴

—James Heckman and Dimitriy Masterov

Long-Term Success Beyond Education: Life, Work, Family

It has been recently stated that pre-kindergarten programs like More at Four are no longer valuable luxuries but, rather they are part of an essential public good. Families whose children have been part of high quality pre-kindergarten experiences report feeling empowered to assist the learning process and encouraged by their child’s early successes in learning.

This sense of early accomplishment builds upon itself as the child continues to add skills leading to concrete accomplishments and milestones. Over the course of a lifetime children who have had the benefit of a high-quality, pre-kindergarten education (such as More at Four) stand out. Research indicates that these concrete advantages include:

- A higher graduation rate
- Being significantly more likely to be employed
- Earning a substantially higher median annual income
- Increasing the likelihood of owning one’s own home⁵

Pre-K: The Movement

The education of our youngest citizens and its concomitant benefits is being widely recognized as crucial to the long-term viability of a healthy society. The National Association of Counties, the National Association of County and City Health Officials, the National League of Cities, the US Conference of Mayors, the National Governors’ Association, the National Conference of State Legislatures, and the Council of State Governments are a few of the governmental entities that have developed focus and programming targeting early childhood education.

A host of civic organizations, such as the National League of Women Voters, Kiwanis International, American Red Cross, and others are also endorsing a broad-based community support approach to early childhood education. Lastly, there are a large number of cities and counties in the US that have been recognized by the National League of Cities as model communities for quality care and education for children, ages birth to five, and their families.

All of these entities and many more have evolved to the realization that investment in quality pre-k education for young children is a rational and sensible method of insuring the quality of life of all citizens over the long-term.

Pre-Kindergarten in Durham County

The Need for Pre-Kindergarten in Durham

It is critical that Durham County ensures that young children have access to high quality early education since we know that many Durham children face multiple risk factors that put them at risk for school failure. Poverty is one important risk factor that impacts school readiness and success. Since 20% of young children are living in poverty in Durham, quality early educational opportunities are vital in promoting school success. In addition, with the increase of Latino/Hispanic families residing in Durham, family language and literacy issues will continue to be an obstacle in preparing children for school. Given recent research findings that Hispanic children enter kindergarten with less proficiency than white children in foundational mathematics and reading knowledge and skills,⁶ providing rich early childhood environments will be essential for boosting their school readiness as well.

In addition to a host of risk factors that are present in Durham, current indicators tell us that not all of our children are entering school prepared with the tools necessary to learn and succeed. In the 2004/2005 school year, 7% of kindergartners were not promoted to the next grade. This is up from 5% in the 1999/2000 school year. Moreover, Durham's End-of-Grade test scores are below state average scores. As early as the third grade, the End of Grade tests show that Durham Reading and Math scores (72 and 62) fall short of the state average (82 and 71). For these reasons, it is imperative that Durham supports quality pre-kindergarten initiatives which research has proven are associated with improvements in school readiness and long-term educational outcomes.

A Snapshot of Four-Year-Olds in Durham County

North Carolina State Demographics data indicates that there are 3,591 four-year-olds living in Durham County (2006). According to North Carolina Division of Health and Human Services, Division of Child Development data for January 2008, there are 1,705 four-year-olds enrolled in licensed child

care programs in Durham County.⁷ Licensed child care refers to child care centers and family child care homes that are registered with the Division of Child Development and receive a star rating (1 being the lowest star and 5 being the highest). Of that number, approximately 558 children are enrolled in a high quality program in More at Four private child care sites and Head Start centers. Including the 120 children enrolled in pre-kindergarten offered in Durham Public Schools through Title I funds, there are approximately 678 children enrolled in high quality pre-kindergarten in Durham. Therefore, about 2,913 four-year-olds are either not enrolled in licensed child care or are in settings with lower program standards than those offered through More at Four, Head Start and Durham Public Schools Title I (see next section for information about program standards).

Taking into account that an average of 47% of Durham Public School students qualify for free and reduced lunch (an indication of low family income), this means that there are approximately 1,687 four-year-olds in Durham County that may be at-risk and could greatly benefit from quality school readiness programming. In addition, these children may qualify for high quality pre-kindergarten programs such as More at Four and Head Start, whose main eligibility is based on family income. The math shows us that there is a significant need for expanding the quality pre-kindergarten programs available for four-year-olds.

“One common thread among most successful kindergartners is that early in their lives they were lovingly taught, encouraged and often challenged by a variety of new exposures and learning experiences. Parents and teachers have long understood the importance of early care and education and their impact on future school success.”⁸

—Dr. Carl Harris, Superintendent,
Durham Public Schools

High Quality, Government Funded Pre-Kindergarten Programs in Durham

Currently there are three high quality, government funded pre-kindergarten programs in Durham County: Head Start, More at Four, and the Title I Pre-K Program in Durham Public Schools. These programs offer pre-kindergarten students at risk for school failure opportunities for success through enhanced program standards. Each of the three pre-kindergarten programs is required to meet program standards that are above and in addition to what the North Carolina Division of Child Development requires of licensed child care settings. Some of these additional program standards include:

- Lower staff-to-child ratios
- Smaller group size
- An initial developmental screening
- Ongoing child assessments
- Family involvement
- Higher teacher education requirements

A brief description of each program follows.

More at Four

More at Four (MAF) is a pre-kindergarten program that serves four-year-old children at private child care sites, Head Start centers, and public schools. Primary eligibility is based on a family's income being at or below 75% of the State Median Income (\$36,683 for a family of three in 2007). In addition to income, other eligibility factors include previous child care setting, limited English proficiency of parents, developmental delay or an active Individualized Education Program (IEP) and medical condi-

tion (more information about these factors provided in the next section).

Head Start

Head Start (HS) is a federally-funded program operated in Durham by Operation Breakthrough, Inc. Currently, Operation Breakthrough serves 459 three-and four-year-olds, of which 277 are four-year-olds for the 2007/08 school year. Eligibility is based on family income – being at or below the federal poverty income guidelines (\$17,170 for a family of three in 2007). There are five Head Start centers in Durham. For the 2007/08 school year, two HS centers serve 54 dually enrolled More at Four/Head Start (MAF/HS) children in four classrooms: Leathers Meachem and Lyon Park.

Title I, Durham Public Schools

Durham Public Schools (DPS) serve 120 pre-k children through federal Title I funds in elementary schools across the county. Eligibility is based on a child's developmental delay(s). Income is not an eligibility consideration as with HS and MAF programs. For the 2007/08 school year, 53 dually funded MAF/Title I children are served in five elementary schools: CC Spaulding, Eastway, Glen, Lakewood, and Merrick Moore. The classroom locations can change each year based on where the families who apply live.

More at Four in Durham County

More at Four Children and Sites

In the 2006/07 school year, More at Four had 615 applicants and in 2007/08 there were 662 applicants. These numbers are reflective only of the applications on file in the MAF office. A review of the 2007/08 applications and enrollment indicates that the majority of MAF applicants and children

served live in the zip codes with the highest concentrations of free and reduced lunch participation in the public schools.⁹ Nearly all of currently enrolled MAF families (97%) live in one of the following zip codes: 27701, 27703, 27704, 27705, 27707, and 27713. Most of the private and combined HS and MAF sites (94%) and elementary schools (86%) are located in the same zip codes.

2007/08 More at Four Children, Sites and Elementary Schools by Zip Code

Durham Zip Code	# of All MAF Applicants 2007/08	# of MAF applicants served to date 2007/08	# of private and HS MAF sites 2007/08	# of Elementary Schools 2007/08	Free and Reduced lunch % average
27503	2	0	0	1	12.8%
27517	2	1	0	0	—
27560	5	2	0	0	—
27572	1	0	0	0	—
27613	2	1	0	0	—
27701	73	43	2	3	76.1%
27702	2	2	1	0	—
27703	132	72	1	4	70.2%
27704	125	73	2	4	57.6%
27705	91	53	1	3	59.2%
27707	101	62	7	7	60.0%
27708	1	0	0	0	—
27712	22	6	0	3	30.3%
27713	96	48	2	3	39.9%
Unknown	18	0	—	—	—
Total	673	363	16	28	—

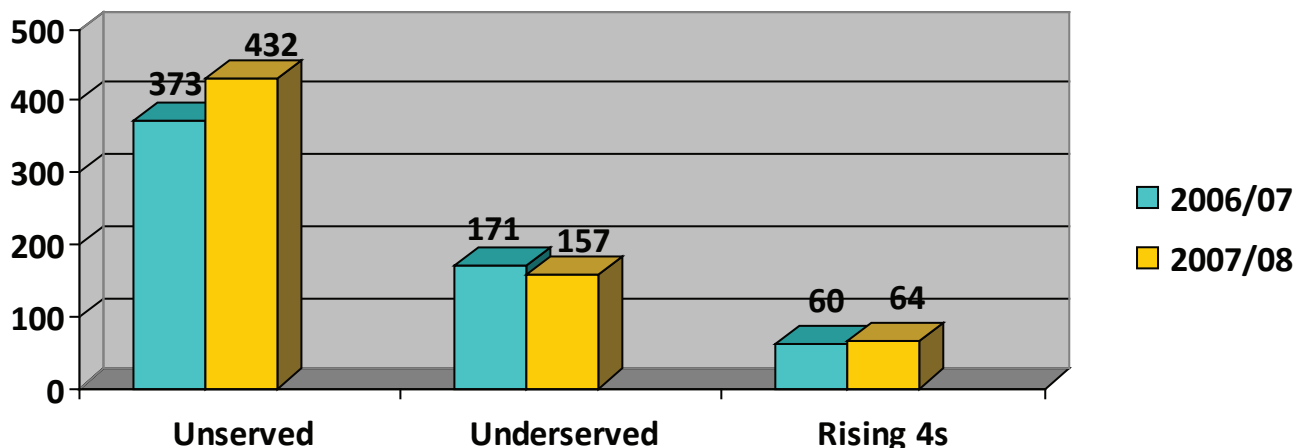
In addition to income, which is the primary eligibility criterion, service priority (the child care setting of the child at the time of application) is also considered. The majority of More at Four applicants have not been in regulated child care at the time of application. The chart below shows the number of applications by service priority.

- Unserved: Children who have never been in child care or have not been in child care within five of the previous 12 months at time of application.
- Underserved: Children who are in settings

that do not meet MAF program standards. This could include one-to-five-star rated child care programs that do not meet MAF program standards (See previous section for information on program standards).

- Rising Fours: An exception to the service priority status allows 50% of the More at Four slots designated to a site to be used to serve that site's three-year-old children when they become eligible for MAF.

More at Four Applications by Service Priority FYs 06/07, 07/08



Blended Funding Makes More at Four Possible

While MAF is a state program, the state does not provide full funding for the program. The Office of School Readiness which oversees MAF encourages counties to leverage all eligible revenue sources to support the MAF classrooms. An example of this is the use of Smart Start dollars for match funding for private child care sites serving MAF children as a means of meeting the funding needed to provide a 6 ½ hour day for ten months of pre-k services. Currently, Durham's Partnership for Children allocated \$1.2 million for this purpose. The National Institute for Early Education Research estimates the cost per child to be \$8,700.¹⁰ The national HS average cost per child in 2006 was \$7,296;¹¹ the local HS grantee (Operation Breakthrough, Inc.) averages \$8,191 per child. The MAF state reimbursement for a four-star child care site is \$3,400 per child; the five-star site reimbursement is \$3,600. This means that the MAF state reimbursement represents approximately 40% of the needed funding, leaving a deficit of \$4,600 - \$5,600 per child.

On July 20, 2007, Governor Michael Easley issued Executive Order 120 which set aside the resources needed to fund MAF serve an additional 10,000 at-risk four-year-olds (\$59.3 million) across the state. This was the largest expansion of the More at Four Program in its six-year history. The Governor's Office had assessed that at-risk four-year-olds across our state remained unserved.

Durham County was only able to access a small number of additional slots due to a lack of available local funding for full support of high quality More at Four. Currently in Durham County, Smart Start funds (\$1.2M) are used to match the More at Four funds in private child care sites, and there were no additional Smart Start dollars provided. The only way to increase slots in the Durham community was through blending funding with Head Start and Durham Public Schools. The current funding resources have reached this capacity for blending. In order to access state More at Four funds to expand the number of More at Four slots available in 2008/2009, the Durham community needs to identify local matching funds.

Recommendation

Based on an identified need in Durham County for more high-quality pre-kindergarten and the availability of state funds to partially support More at Four expansion, Durham's Partnership for Children requests that Durham County funds be allocated as match funding for the More at Four state dollars for additional slots in the public schools and community child care sites. Without the support of Durham County, the community will miss the opportunity to partner with the state to expand this important program. With an additional 108 slots, six classrooms could be added to meet the community need. It is recommended that only new classrooms with 18 children be funded. Please join Durham's Partnership for Children, a Smart Start Initiative, in preparing children for success in school!

Financial Outlook

The cost of expanding the More at Four Program by 108 slots (six full classrooms) in the highest quality setting will total \$1,182,000. This includes operating funds paid to child care sites, costs to start up six new classrooms, and costs to administer the expansion (contracts, monitoring, payment, etc.). The State More at Four Program will provide a \$492,000 match towards a local investment of \$690,000.

More at Four Expansion Planning

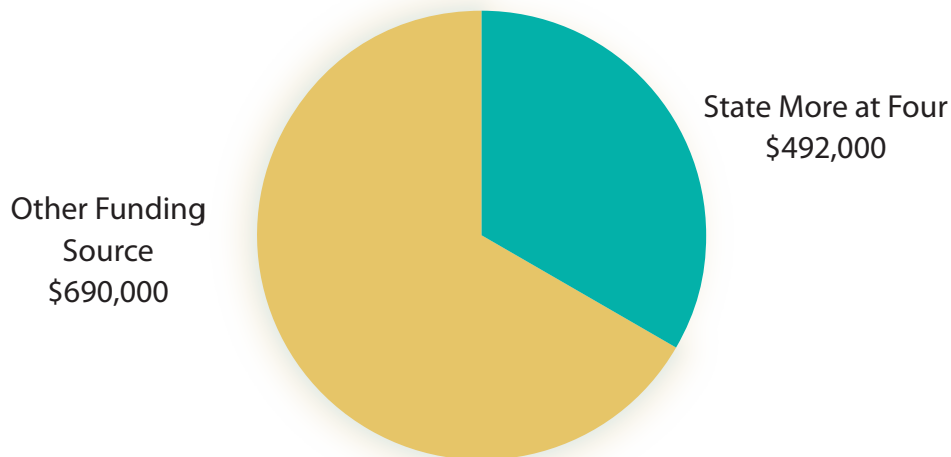
Current Rates for School Day (6 to 6.5 Hours)

	State MAF	Subsidy	Total Per Month	Total for 10 Months
Four-Star Sites	\$ 340	\$ 543	\$ 883	\$ 8,830
Five-Star Sites	\$ 360	\$ 575	\$ 935	\$ 9,350

Expansion for 108 Slots (Six Classrooms)

	Number of Slots	State MAF	Other Funding Source	Total
Operating Funds to Child Care Sites	108	\$ 388,800	\$ 621,000	\$ 1,009,800
Classroom Start-up Costs	108	\$ 54,000	\$ —	\$ 54,000
Administration Costs		\$ 49,200	\$ 69,000	\$ 118,200
Total Costs		\$ 492,000	\$ 690,000	\$ 1,182,000

More at Four Funding Sources



Benefits to the Community

Research shows that children in poverty who have parents with low education levels, family instability and other environmental stressors face challenges in being ready to learn in school. Once they fall behind in learning, they may never catch up. Investing in high quality early childhood education substantially helps children and saves taxpayer dollars in the long run.

The county's investment in quality pre-kindergarten will:

- Provide a high-quality early educational experience to more at-risk four-year-olds, most of whom have either never been in a child care setting before or who have been in lower quality child care.
- Reach at-risk four-year-olds prior to kindergarten entry will aid Durham Public Schools in meeting the No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Law. The reauthorization of NCLB includes a provision for holding states accountable for ensuring that all students can read and master math at grade level by 2014.¹²

- Improve long-term outcomes for children and impact the overall well-being of the county. Research tells us that children in high quality early education are less likely to repeat a grade, need special education services, suffer health problems, drop out of school, become teen parents and go to prison.
- Serve as a model across the state. While there has been growing attention and commitment to quality pre-kindergarten at the national and state levels, Durham County would lead the way by its local investment in pre-kindergarten as part of a long term strategy to boost K-12 student achievement.

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