



PROVING THE

POWER

OF PRE-K

How Investments in Pre-K Teaching and Learning Pay Off for Students, Educators, Families, and Community

REPORT PREPARED BY THE PRE-K PRIORITY

JANUARY 2026

We Have a Powerful Opportunity

Forsyth County can and should be a beacon for future growth and prosperity in North Carolina. By the time today's Pre-K students are graduating high school, we can be the place where overwhelming numbers of students are excelling in school, teachers are respected and valued for their contributions, parents want to raise families in our community and are more involved in their children's education, and the public cost of extra supports for social services, educational interventions, and the justice system are reduced. Seem like a dream? **We're proving it can happen.**

Today's young learners will drive tomorrow's society and economy — and tomorrow will be here before we know it. But right now in Forsyth County:

- Only 45% of 4-year-olds are in a licensed Pre-K program.
- Only 44% of 3rd graders in WS/FCS are reading at grade level.
- Only 33% of Black and 29% of Hispanic/Latino 3rd graders are reading at grade level, yet they make up over 60% of our student population.

These are serious challenges to our community's future growth and prosperity, but there is a solution. Research has shown time and time again that **children who attend Pre-K are better prepared to learn in kindergarten**. And learning in kindergarten is a cornerstone for third-grade reading, which in turn is an indicator of success through high school and beyond.

The power of Pre-K is undeniable, yet we deprive the opportunity to far too many children and families.

As a community, we know how to harness this power and change our future.

Leaders in Forsyth County have known about the efficacy of Pre-K for years, and have been working diligently for more than a decade to raise awareness and expand the power of Pre-K for all 4-year-olds. In 2023, the Forsyth County Board of Commissioners and the City of Winston-Salem invested over \$4 million in funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) in a two-year, proof-of-concept initiative to show the benefits of investing public dollars in high-quality Pre-K. Called the Pre-K Model Cohort Classroom initiative, its work was rooted in the goal of **The Pre-K Priority: improve the quality, accessibility, and number of Pre-K classrooms in Forsyth County and eliminate persistent educational disparities among students entering kindergarten.**

The proof is in the positive results.

In just two years, students in the Pre-K Model Cohort Classroom initiative:

- **Demonstrated growth that was 2-3 times higher than typical Pre-K programs**, despite the fact that many started the school year with significant developmental gaps.
- **Met or exceeded proficiency levels** for typical populations.
- **Closed wide achievement gaps** within a single year.

Want more proof? Skip ahead to pages 7 and 14.

ABOUT THE PRE-K PRIORITY

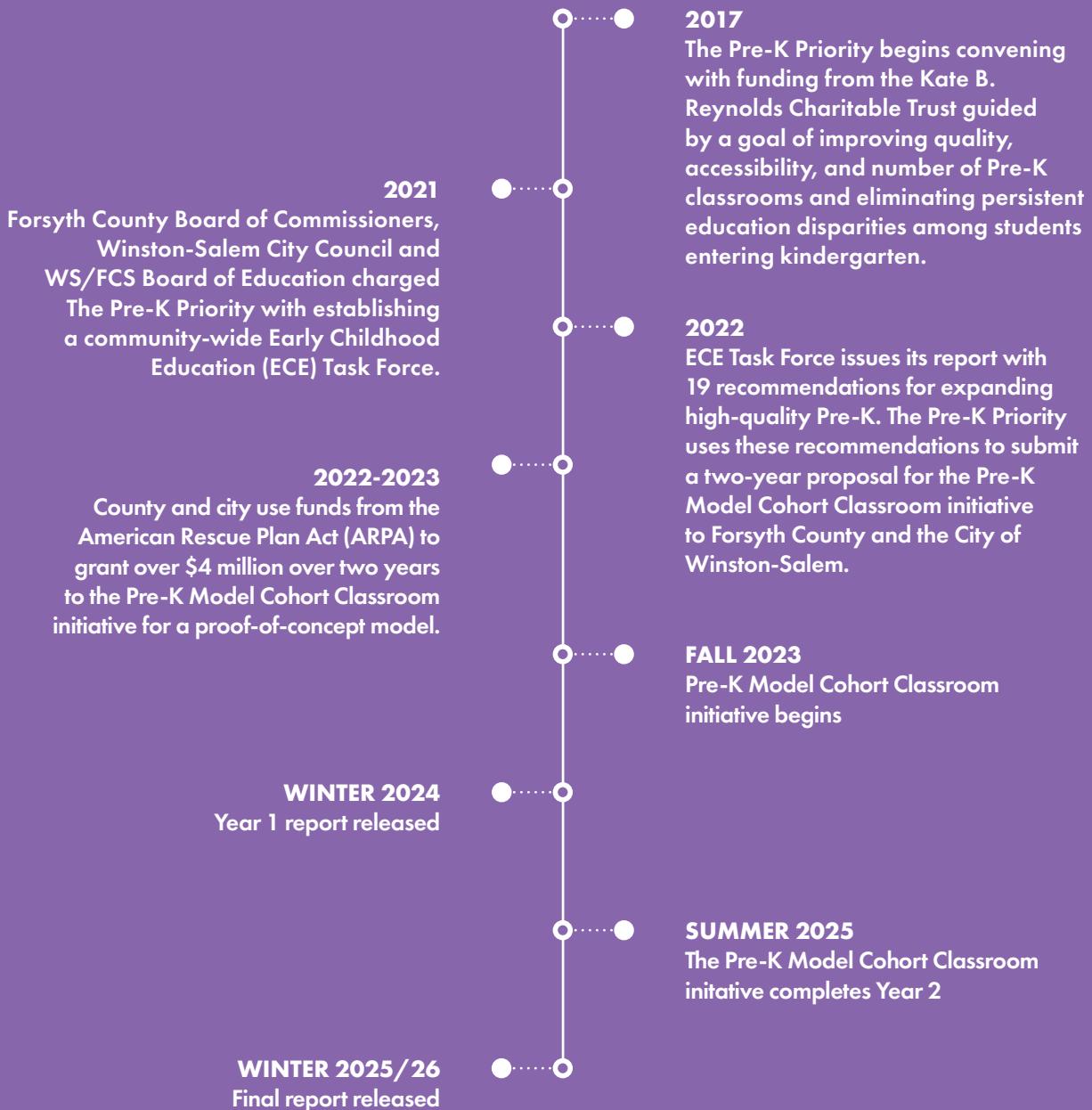
The Pre-K Priority was formed in 2014 by a group of early childhood education (ECE) professionals and advocates to explore how to improve access to and the quality of early childhood programs available in Forsyth County. Since then, we've grown to include an ever-expanding number of ECE/Pre-K professionals, community organizations, businesses, health care leaders, faith organizations, government leaders, families, and others who share a commitment to making high-quality, affordable Pre-K available to every four-year-old. We work to educate and advocate for high-quality Pre-K programs and establish standards for a comprehensive and robust ECE system. We provide research on the current state of Pre-K in Forsyth County as it relates to the state and national level, and make the case for increased investment.

Learn more at www.prekpriority.org



Understanding the Power of Pre-K isn't New.

In fact, we've been building support for nearly a decade.



Learn more about The Pre-K Priority

Powered by Collaboration

The Pre-K Model Cohort Classroom initiative combined a **shared vision with a collaborative approach and the expertise of many partners.**

“We started as a coalition because we knew we were stronger together, and we wanted to strengthen the capacity of all the agencies and bring in the lived experience of families who have been left out of the story.”

– Leslie Mullinix, Project Director of The Pre-K Priority (housed at Family Services)

Child Care Resource Center provided data-informed and teacher-informed **professional development training and support** to lead teachers and assistant teachers. Trainings increased teachers' skills, fidelity, and confidence in delivering high-quality care and instruction. Child Care Resource Center professional development specialists collaborated with Smart Start Success Coaches to ensure regular and frequent feedback.

Family Services ensured that families of 4-year-olds were engaged in their children's education and success by providing trained **Family Advocates who used evidence-based family engagement practices** from Head Start to strengthen connections between families, classrooms, centers, and Pre-K students.

Forsyth Futures served as the **data collection and management** partner for the cohort classrooms and worked with independent evaluator **Prismatic Services** to support the **evaluation and outcomes reporting** for cohort classrooms, teachers, families, funders, and the community.

“What makes this project powerful is our collaborative approach. Our partners have united resources—Success Coaches, Family Advocates, curriculum tools, and assessments—to provide wraparound support that meets young learners where they are and accelerates their path to kindergarten success.”

– Glynnise Highsmith, Vice President of Early Childhood Initiatives at Smart Start of Forsyth County

Hispanic League provided interpretation and translation services for English Language Learners and their families through the enrollment process, classroom support, and community engagement activities, including outreach throughout Forsyth County.

“We worked hard to break down the language barriers that can make the Pre-K experience feel out of reach for multilingual families. Whether translating enrollment forms, supporting classroom conversations, or stepping in when teachers needed an interpreter, our aim was to help every family feel understood, included, and supported.”

– Diane Massas, Executive Director at Hispanic League



Smart Start of Forsyth County provided administrative oversight, monitoring, and reporting, and served as **fiscal agent** for the cohort initiative. In addition, Smart Start provided or managed many of the **educator supports**, including Success Coaches, salary supplements, retention bonuses, and tuition funding for educators seeking higher-level credentials. Smart Start also facilitated regular meetings among all collaborative partners.

Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools' Office of Equity, Access, and Acceleration conducted an **equity assessment** of practices across the full early childhood education landscape within the Pre-K Model Cohort Classrooms, and developed and deployed an **equity action plan**. This plan has been adopted by community partners to strengthen equity practices across Forsyth County.

"We want every child to get access to a very high-quality program. One of the great benefits of the ARPA dollars was around the focus of continuing equity. The district got an Equity Coordinator that looked at how we ensure our approach to Pre-K communications were equitable."

- Paula Wilkins, Chief Academic Officer at Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools

WHY EQUITY IS CRITICAL

The Pre-K Model Cohort Classroom initiative focused on serving families and children who have historically been unable to access high-quality Pre-K. These are the children who are at greatest risk of falling behind their peers, and we know that providing tailored attention now will make a significant impact in closing learning gaps and positioning them for success. Supporting equity infused every facet of our work, and included supports not just for young learners, but for the teachers and families who are pivotal in their learning and development. When everyone has what they need to succeed, we all are better off.

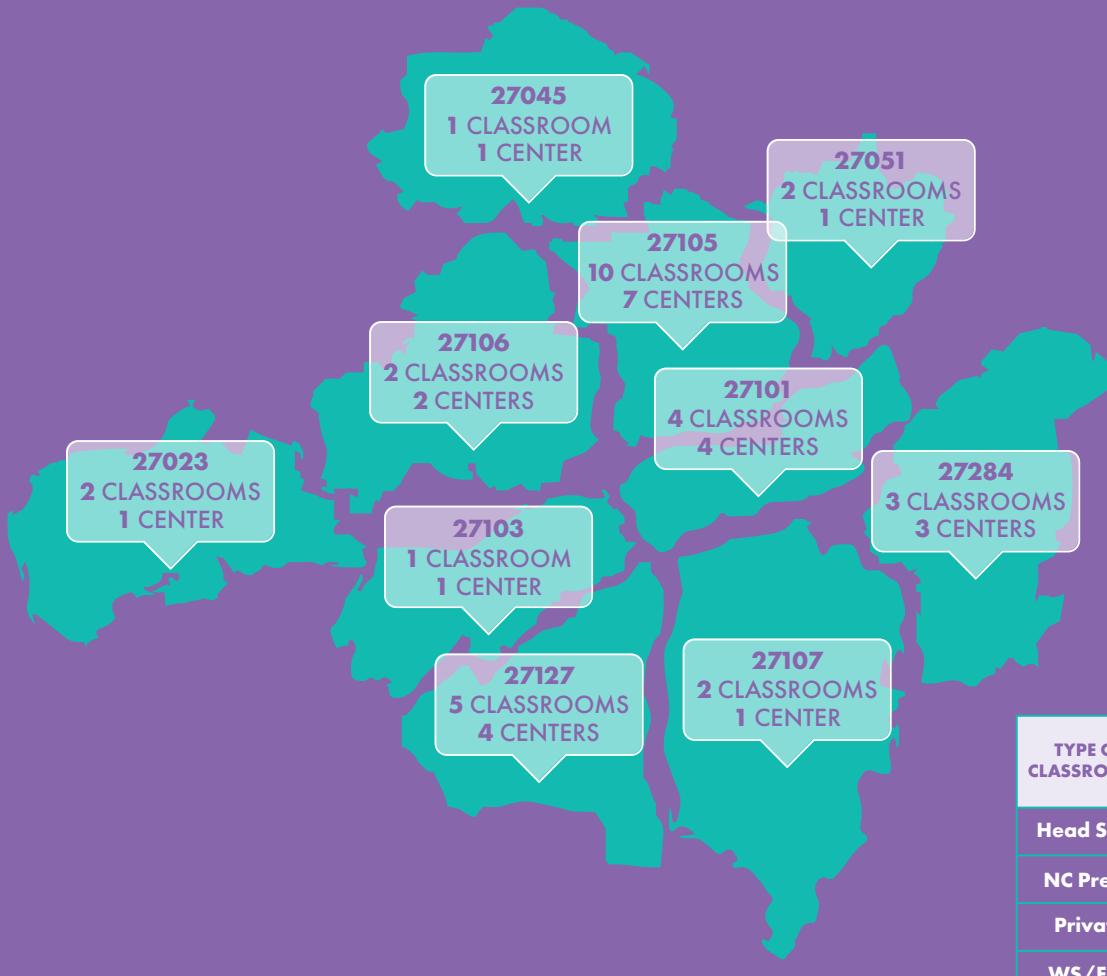


It's 8:00 am and Chelsea smiles as she brings her son Mason into his Pre-K classroom.

Mason is a curious and active four-year-old, and Chelsea knows that his young brain is still growing rapidly. She watches as Mason gives his teacher, Ms. Shawntia, a big hug and goes to wash his hands. All the way to school, he chattered brightly about the butterfly larva in the classroom that were about to hatch, the Lego city that he and his friend Kaceyon built, and the praise he received during circle time for working out how to share a toy dinosaur with another classmate. It's clear that Ms. Shawntia loves bringing learning to life and providing hands-on experiences to her students. Her classroom is always organized, clean, professional, and exciting for young learners. When the year began, Mason was quiet and shy, and struggled with speech challenges. Chelsea is awed by how Mason has come out of his shell and how much he loves to learn. As she leaves the classroom, she smiles again, knowing that her beloved boy is safe and nurtured — and she hurries off to work knowing she'll be more productive because of it.

Where We Invested

The Pre-K Model Cohort Classroom initiative made **strategic investments to create demonstrable positive impact.**



TYPE OF CLASSROOMS	NUMBER OF CLASSROOMS 23-24	NUMBER OF CLASSROOMS 24-25
Head Start	3	3
NC Pre-K	10	10
Private	10	12
WS/FCS	7	7

Our Investment Reached

710
Unduplicated Students

36
Unduplicated Classrooms
IN
27
Pre-K Centers*

76
Teachers/Assistant Teachers

*including Head Start, NC Pre-K, private, and Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools locations

What We Accomplished

After just two years, our investment powered **significant results for students, teachers, families, and community.**

Our Children are Ready for Kindergarten

Pre-K Model Cohort Classroom students were evaluated using best-practice tools. At the end of the 2024-2025 school year, our **students showed strong growth in multiple areas that indicate kindergarten readiness.**

Assessment Tool <small>For more data on student assessment, see page 14</small>	Percentage of Students Showing Growth	Percentage Point Growth for Pre-K Model Cohort Classrooms	Percentage Point Growth for NC Pre-K Classrooms State Wide
TS GOLD Math	100%	64	31
TS GOLD Cognitive	98%	66	39
TS GOLD Social-Emotional Development	96%	56	35
TS GOLD Physical Development	99%	67	33
TS GOLD Literacy	93%	29	31
TS GOLD Language	97%	34	35

Teachers Are All In

Teachers **demonstrated a strong commitment** to their classrooms and continually improved their practice.

- 83% staff retention rates across all cohort sites (100% in Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools cohort classrooms)
- 1,850+ hours of coaching and professional development for teachers and teaching assistants
- 96% of educators confident in their ability to prepare all students for kindergarten



Parents are Happy

Parents **indicated high satisfaction** with their children's experiences.

- 92% overall satisfaction
- 100% indicated child enjoys Pre-K most days
- 100% indicated programs were communicated in their home language

Financial Return on Investment

Well-known Nobel Prize-winning economist James J. Heckman estimates a 7:1 annual return on long-term investment for dollars dedicated to Pre-K programs. That means **the \$4 million invested so far through the Pre-K Model Cohort Classroom initiative would result in millions of dollars of savings** in the cost of educational supports, justice system involvement, and social services down the road.

For children to be successful in Pre-K, in school, and in life, they need skilled and committed teachers, supportive (and supported) families, and a community that stands behind them. The Pre-K Model Cohort Classroom initiative's collaborative partners delivered on all of these factors, creating powerful, life-enhancing experiences for more than 700 4-year-olds.

High-Quality Classrooms and Expert Teachers

A powerful Pre-K experience depends on well-trained, highly motivated teachers and the classroom environments in which they work. The 76 teachers and assistants who participated in Pre-K Model Cohort Classrooms will continue to guide and inspire young learners in every classroom they teach going forward.

Early childhood education is a field plagued by low wages, early burnout, and high turnover. The Pre-K Model Cohort Classrooms transformed that scenario with salaries and retention bonuses that more equitably and realistically reflect the value that credentialed educators bring to the classroom. We coupled that with personalized coaching, meaningful professional development, and access to professional credentialing programs.

Salaries and Retention

All teachers and assistants in Model Cohort Classrooms were paid according to the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools salary schedule to ensure pay equity across the board. Across both years, 79 teachers and assistants who remained in their positions for more than 90 days were paid an average retention bonus of \$4,078. Fifty-six (56) of those participants were also eligible for salary parity which brought their total average support up to \$12,567 (including retention bonuses and salary parity across two years).

Success Coaches

The lead teacher and one teacher assistant in each Model Cohort Classroom were assigned a licensed Success Coach from Smart Start of Forsyth County. **Success Coaches provided one-on-one guidance and resources** to help teachers meet the specific needs of students in their classrooms. Success Coaches also administered the TS Gold and Brigance assessments to students and helped teachers interpret and address those results.

Over two years, Success Coaches conducted 661 site visits, totaling 859 hours. As a result, teachers rated themselves an 8.6 out of 10, on average, for their **ability to adequately prepare students for kindergarten**. Teachers also noted that coaching was especially helpful in dealing with the increasing number of social/emotional challenges among their students.



See how coaching changes classrooms

Professional Development and Credential Support

The Pre-K Model Classroom Cohort initiative offered 96 professional development sessions over two years, each designed and staffed by experts from Child Care Resource Center. Topics included creating environments for learning, growth mindsets, assessments, and addressing challenging behaviors. Professional development sessions were not mandatory, but they were popular; teachers and assistant teachers devoted more than 1,000 hours to improving their practice. By Year 2, 100% of educators reported their professional development was valuable.



Watch how professional development supports teachers

The Pre-K Model Cohort Classroom initiative also offered tuition support, scholarships, and stipends to help educators pursue higher education and professional credentials in early childhood education. Although many teachers already had the credentials or degrees they wanted, six teachers and eight assistants took advantage of this support over two years.

Mason sometimes struggles to regulate his feelings when it's time to move from the playground back to the classroom.



Ms. Shawntia is eager to work with Mason today so she can try out a new technique to help him make a smooth transition. Shawntia learned the technique from her Success Coach, Je'Lisa. They meet at least bi-weekly to talk about what's going on in the classroom, review lesson plans, identify challenges and opportunities for each student, and brainstorm ways to address them. Je'Lisa also conducts beginning-of-year and end-of-year assessments for each student, and helps Shawntia use the results to develop tailored instruction plans for each learner.

In addition, Ms. Shawntia has learned a lot from the free professional development sessions offered throughout the year. They aren't mandatory, but she always goes because there is always something new to learn and apply in her classroom right away. Although she's taught for many years, Shawntia senses more strongly than ever that the community around her wants her to grow and succeed. Her earnings this year are finally on par with all other Pre-K teachers. That provides her family with critical resources in a tight economy, and she uses some of her income to supplement her classroom supplies.

Shawntia gives Mason a quick hug before story time begins. She loves Mason's enthusiasm, and knows that she is gently and effectively steering him in the right direction. His smile says it all — learning should always be fun!

Classroom Quality and Equity

Success Coaches conducted annual evaluations to **increase the safety and quality of each Model Cohort**

Classroom through two well-regarded evaluation tools: the Early Childhood Environment Rating Subscale (ECERS), and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS®). On average, Model Cohort Classrooms scored a 6.1 out of 7 on the ECERS scale in Year 2, increasing by 0.6 points from Year 1, and 80% of all teachers scored in the middle to high range on the CLASS assessment.

We also ensured that teachers would have more tools to **promote equity within each classroom**. Over the course of two years, the Equity Coordinator from WS/FCS created and deployed an Equity Observation Tool, a Curriculum Measure, and an Action Plan for all classrooms — and provided 14

professional development sessions. As a result, 97% of teachers said that their classrooms are inclusive and value all cultures and backgrounds, and 96% are confident in their ability to prepare all students for kindergarten.

What's more, the findings from the Equity Audit confirmed that salary equity supplements, retention incentives, and tuition support for higher credentialing improved workforce stability.

All of these supports contributed to an average teacher retention rate of 80% in Year 1 and 83% in Year 2. WS/FCS and Head Start classrooms achieved 100% retention.

In addition, 100% of parents indicated high levels of satisfaction with the staff in their child's classroom.

Engaged Parents and Families

Parents and families are a child's first and most important teachers. They are the leading force in providing a stable home environment and reinforcing what children learn in the classroom.

Too many families in Forsyth County need help to provide a stable environment for their young children. Employment, food security, housing, transportation, education, and financial security are all challenges. The Pre-K Model Cohort Classroom initiative included a wide variety of resources and supports inside and outside the classroom so that **parents could better engage in and strengthen their child's Pre-K experience.**

Family Advocates

Family Advocates from Family Services offered a wide range of training, resources, case management, and other **evidence-based supports tailored to the needs of each family and student.** At the Pre-K centers, Advocates helped families understand student assessments and classroom approaches. They also met with families at home to help them navigate services and set goals for education, employment, transportation, and more. Over two years, 13 Family Advocates held conferences with 114 families, conducted 107 home visits, and helped families set 127 specific goals.



Discover the support a Family Advocate provides

Interpretation Services

Forsyth County families represent diverse ethnicities and backgrounds. While roughly 30% of students are Black, 30% White, and 30% Hispanic, there are many other ethnicities woven into our communities, and many families are not fluent in English. Translation and interpretation services from the Hispanic League **made information accessible to all families.** Over two years, families used translation and interpretation services 95 times in 5 languages. These services were especially useful during enrollment periods and family engagement events.

Child Health and Safety

Supporting children's health is vital to their ability to learn. The Pre-K Model Cohort Classrooms deployed a child care health consultant who helped to **ensure children's health and classroom safety.** The health consultant conducted 90 health, vision, and dental screenings, and provided 48 referrals for additional screenings and immunizations. The consultant also reviewed each student's health record and conducted an environmental assessment for healthy and safe behaviors in each classroom, such as handwashing, injury prevention, food handling, and more.

"Health screenings help teachers to be prepared for any challenges that they may have in the classroom. It also helps teachers understand how they may have to modify their teaching for a child who has autism or a hearing disability. We also helped bridge the gap between doctors' records, family advocates, and the teachers to make sure students were receiving the services they needed."

—Ketura Oglesby, Manager of Public Health Education & Services at Smart Start of Forsyth County



Family Activities

Bringing children and families together in a Pre-K setting helps **build a strong sense of community.** Events held at Pre-K Model Cohort Classroom centers included festivals, student performances, and education sessions about kindergarten readiness. Over two years, 78% of parents participated in 36 family engagement events and activities at their child's preschool.



Today after school, Chelsea, Mason's mom, has a conference with Ophelia, a Family Advocate who has made a big difference in Chelsea's life.

When they first met at the beginning of the school year, Ophelia helped Chelsea with the enrollment process. She also helped Chelsea obtain an Independent Education Plan (IEP) for Mason which gave him access to speech therapists to work on speech challenges. Ophelia recognized that Chelsea had innate leadership qualities, and encouraged her to become chairperson of the parent council at Mason's school.

Ophelia and Success Coach Je'Lisa also work with other parents in Ms. Shawntia's class to help them address almost any family need — from finding a job or continuing education, to budgeting for increased financial stability, to providing warm coats or gas or gift cards for families who need help with basic necessities. Ophelia also helps parents think through ways to manage their own stress and incorporate simple practices to reinforce what their children are learning in Ms. Shawntia's classroom.

After talking with Ophelia, Chelsea scoops up Mason and heads out — a little more confident in her parenting skills and ready to try a few new activities at home.



Broad Community Reach

Great Pre-K classrooms and centers are created with intention.

Strong community collaboration was an essential part of the Pre-K Model Cohort Classroom initiative's success.

The Pre-K Model Cohort Classroom initiative grew from the momentum created by the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust through its 10-year Great Expectations initiative, which laid the groundwork for further collaborative investment in Pre-K.

Although the Pre-K Model Cohort Classroom initiative was piloted in 36 of Forsyth County's 106 active centers, there are many ways in which the **successes achieved are already informing the broader community.**

- **The equity infrastructure and shared tools** that guided all Pre-K Model Cohort Classrooms are available for future use by any Pre-K classroom in the county.
- **The collaborative partnerships** that formed to support the Pre-K Model Cohort Classrooms will endure beyond the two-year pilot and can be expanded to future efforts.

The strong evidence of the positive effects of investing in high-quality Pre-K can help inform a new model for Pre-K to 12 public education for Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools.

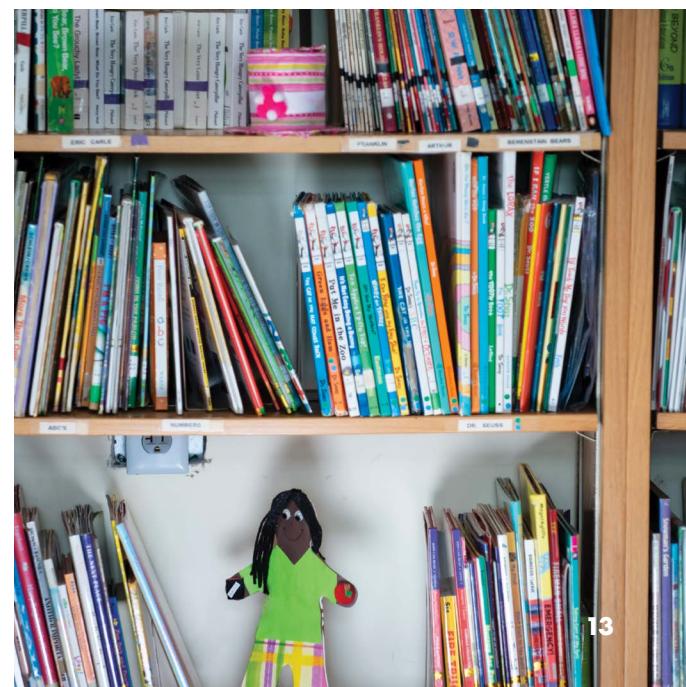
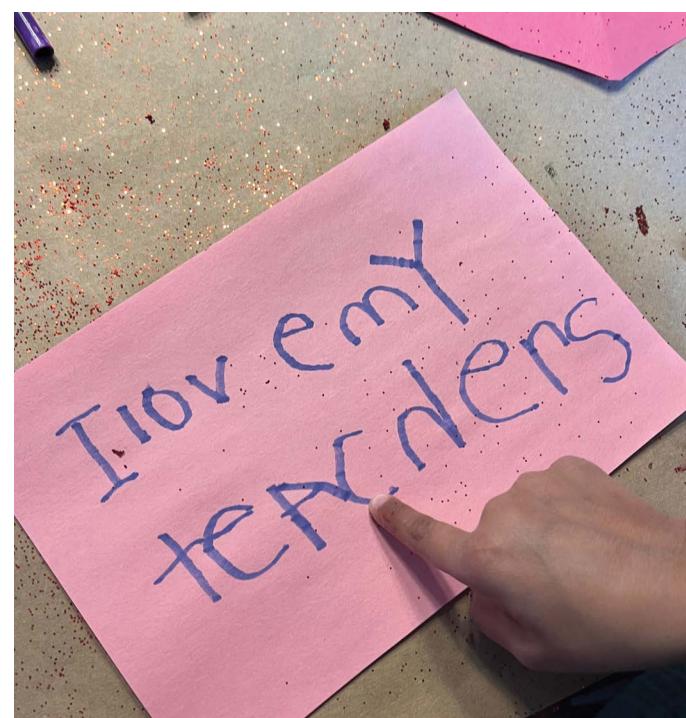
Bottom Line

With continued strong collaboration, community engagement, and investment, the success of the Pre-K Model Cohort Classrooms can — and should — expand throughout Forsyth County. Giving young learners a strong start on their pathway to success is one of the smartest investments we can make, ensuring better long-term outcomes for students, their families, and our entire community.



Today is a warm spring day and a little different than most days in Ms. Shawntia's class. Today, Success Coach Je'Lisa is giving Mason a learning assessment.

It will measure his progress from the beginning of the year in reading, literacy, and math. Mason remembers doing similar activities with Je'Lisa at the beginning of the school year. It was fun then, but it's really fun now! Je'Lisa asks him to identify specific letters, point out words that rhyme, count as high as he can, and solve a simple word problem. What Mason doesn't know is that this session with Je'Lisa is part of the ongoing assessment and monitoring that Je'Lisa and Ms. Shawntia do constantly to ensure Mason can start kindergarten ready and eager to learn. Mason also doesn't know that the data collected from assessments in each classroom help inform strategies in every classroom. To Mason, it's just fun to answer the questions and talk with Je'Lisa. He can't wait to tell his mom about it at pick-up time.



Our Students Are Powerful Learners

When it comes to student success from the Pre-K Model Cohort Classrooms, our results speak for themselves. We saw progress across every domain assessed by TS GOLD® and Brigance.

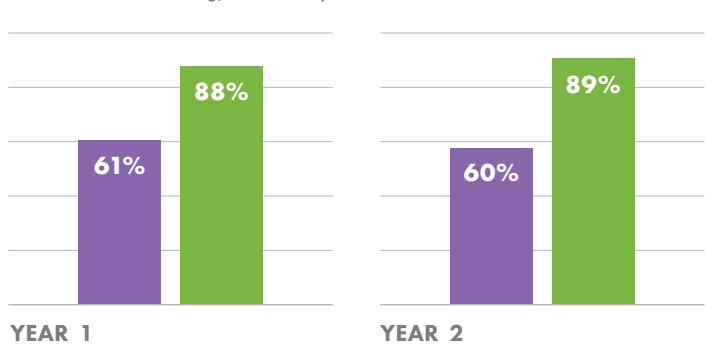
TS GOLD® Student Outcomes

The Pre-K Model Cohort Classrooms used Teaching Strategies Gold® (TS GOLD®) as evidence-based ongoing observational assessment to evaluate Kindergarten Readiness in key areas including literacy, math, and social/emotional development.

TS GOLD® Literacy

% of students meeting/above expectations

■ Beginning of Year
■ End of Year



Across Year 1 and Year 2, program students demonstrated literacy gains.

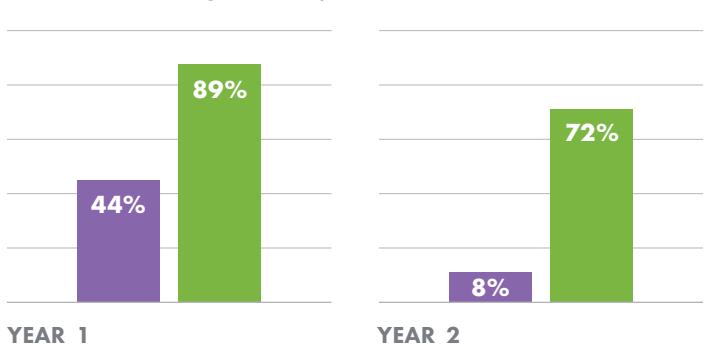
In Year 1 BOY, 39% of program students enrolled with literacy skills that were below expectations. By EOY, only 12% had literacy skills below expectations; 97% of all program students demonstrated literacy gains.

In Year 2 BOY, 40% of program students enrolled with literacy skills that were below expectations. By EOY, only 11% had literacy skills below expectations; 93% of all program students demonstrated literacy gains.

TS GOLD® Math

% of students meeting/above expectations

■ Beginning of Year
■ End of Year



Across Year 1 and Year 2, program students demonstrated math gains.

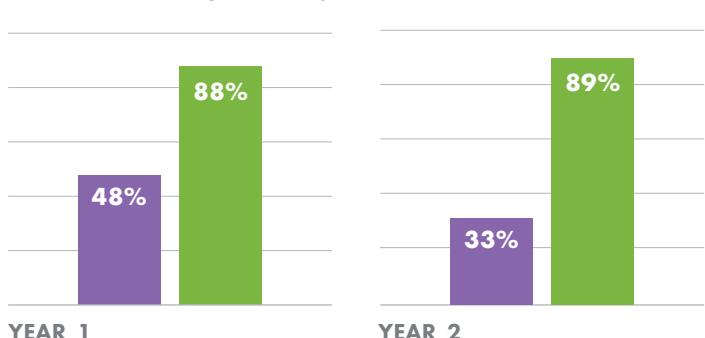
In Year 1 BOY, 56% of program students enrolled with math skills that were below expectations. By EOY, only 11% had math skills below expectations; 97% of all program students demonstrated math gains.

In Year 2 BOY, 92% of program students enrolled with math skills that were below expectations. By EOY, only 28% had math skills below expectations; 100% of all program students demonstrated math gains.

TS GOLD® Social-Emotional

% of students meeting/above expectations

■ Beginning of Year
■ End of Year



Across Year 1 and Year 2, program students demonstrated social-emotional gains.

In Year 1 BOY, 52% of program students enrolled with Social-Emotional skills that were below expectations. By EOY, only 12% had social-emotional skills below expectations; 96% of all program students demonstrated social-emotional gains.

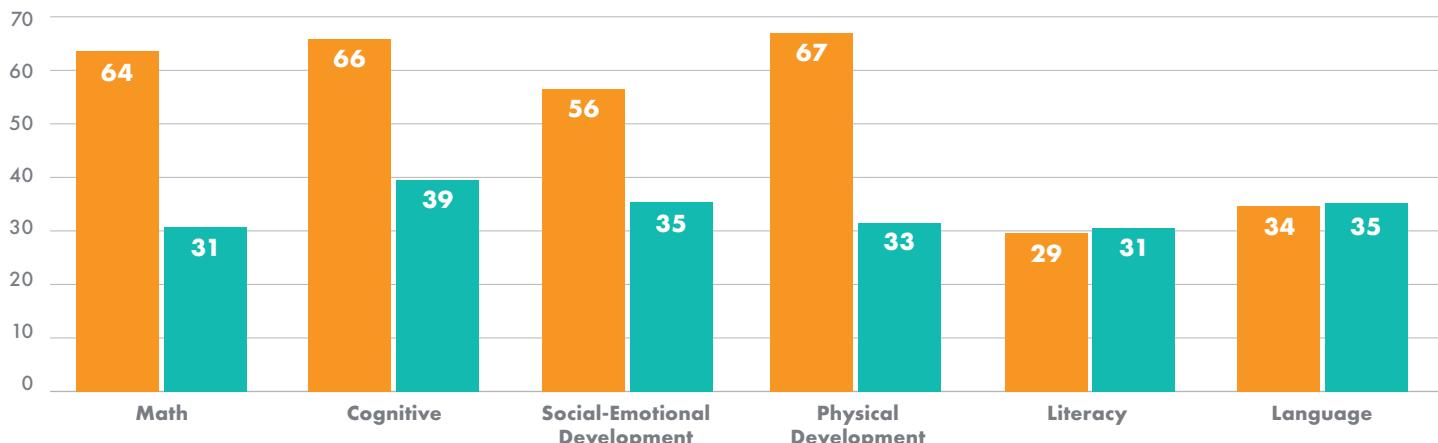
In Year 2 BOY, 67% of program students enrolled with Social-Emotional skills that were below expectations. By EOY, only 11% had social-emotional skills below expectations; 96% of all program students demonstrated social-emotional gains.

TS GOLD® GROWTH COMPARISON:

Pre-K Model Cohort Classrooms VS NC Pre-K Classrooms Statewide

as shown by percentage points

■ Pre-K Model Cohort Classroom 2024-2025
■ NC Pre-K Classroom Benchmark Data 2023-2024



Brigance Student Outcomes

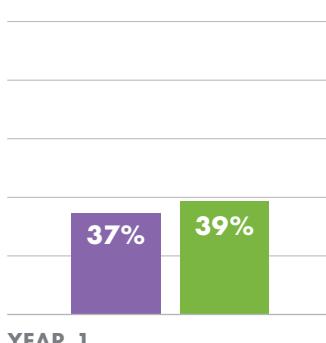
The Brigance Inventory of Early Development tool (Brigance) evaluates and monitors progress of children who are functioning below the development age of 7 in multiple areas.

BRIGANCE Literacy

% of students meeting/above expectations

■ Beginning of Year

■ End of Year

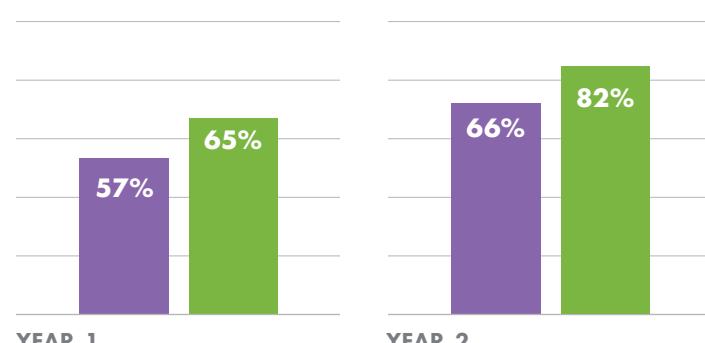


BRIGANCE Math

% of students meeting/above expectations

■ Beginning of Year

■ End of Year



Across Year 1 and Year 2, program students demonstrated improvement over the below average rates for both Literacy and Math at enrollment.

Literacy

In the literacy section, in Year 1 on the BOY Brigance, 63% of program students scored "below average". At the end of Year 1, 61% had below average skills. In Year 2, 57% of program students scored "below average" and at the end of Year 2, 43% had below average skills.

Math

In the math section, in Year 1 on the BOY Brigance, 43% of program students scored "below average". At the end of Year 1, 35% had below average skills. In Year 2, 34% of program students scored "below average" and at the end of Year 2, 18% had below average skills.

WHAT'S NEXT

Our students learned a lot in their Pre-K Model Cohort classrooms, and they — along with their families, teachers, and centers — taught us a great deal as well. We will use those lessons to **continue our focus on enhancing quality and expanding reach** beyond the first two years of the Pre-K Model Cohort Classroom initiative.

What We've Learned

A formative evaluation of the Pre-K Model Cohort Classroom initiative conducted by Prismatic Services, Inc. suggests that **further gains are possible** by increasing instructional support to teachers and strengthening the use of data, coaching, and family engagement across all sites. The evaluation also recommended maintaining existing collaborative partnerships for expanded reach and continuing the use of student assessment data as a guide to strategic investment of resources.

Equity should, and will, continue to be a driving force. Recommendations and lessons from our equity audit include: continuing to integrate representation of diverse groups into teaching and learning materials, continuing teacher professional development to improve instructional differentiation and quality, targeting strategies to directly address disparities in student performance, improving communication with families, recruiting more diverse teachers, and continued monitoring.

In addition, a review of the Pre-K Model Cohort Classroom initiative by MDC highlighted **opportunities to improve communication** among all parties engaged in the initiative to increase transparency and inclusion in decision-making.

We also have an opportunity to **strengthen the governance structure** that drives our collaboration as we move forward in pursuit of expanded and sustainable funding to provide high-quality Pre-K to more children and families.

Although the students from Years 1 and 2 have now moved on to kindergarten and first grade, there are thousands of new 4-year-olds coming behind them ready to engage in high-quality Pre-K classrooms. If we make the strategic decision to offer each of these children high-quality Pre-K that leads to kindergarten readiness, we can — within a dozen years — change outcomes for the entire Winston-Salem/Forsyth County school system.

We will continue advocating until the power of Pre-K is provided to every family that needs it.

The Pre-K Priority's next steps to further advocate for affordable, high-quality Pre-K in our community include:

- Strengthening and expanding our collaborative to include more partners and investors from both the public and private sectors, because we know what's working.
- Building on and sharing the learnings from the Pre-K Model Cohort Classrooms as a means of increasing high-quality experiences and outcomes across our early childhood education ecosystem.
- Working with Pre-K and kindergarten teachers to develop an aligned understanding of what "kindergarten-ready" really means and supporting more equitable and successful transitions into and out of Pre-K for all students.
- Exploring ways to further reduce barriers to Pre-K, beginning with parent conversations about classroom equity, enrollment practices, and access to wraparound care (before and after school).

"The Pre-K Priority is about empowering people [in our community] to lean into their advocacy. That gets other people on board and helps us grow the coalition to a place where our civic leaders want to be a part of this project and increase the funding that comes from the state, the city, and our local county funds."

— Leslie Mullinix, Project Director of The Pre-K Priority (housed at Family Services)

**WE WILL CONTINUE
ADVOCATING UNTIL
THE POWER OF
PRE-K IS PROVIDED
TO EVERY FAMILY
THAT NEEDS IT.**

Invest in the Power of Pre-K

The availability of high-quality Pre-K directly affects how our children fare in kindergarten, elementary school, high school, and beyond. Data shows that investing in early education pays off significantly in terms of cost savings from social programs and increased earning power into adulthood.

Investing in Pre-K means investing in teachers. Countless sources report — and our experience shows — that supporting teachers with equitable pay, professional development and coaching, and opportunities for advanced credentialing leads to higher retention rates and educators who are more engaged and fulfilled in their careers.

And of course, investing in Pre-K means investing in our community — especially in our education system. Forsyth County has recently proven its commitment to our public schools. Supporting our school system with more young learners who are well-prepared for kindergarten will enhance the educational experience — for teachers and students — and reduce the cost of remedial or additional support services in coming years. Better yet, incorporating universal Pre-K (across a variety of settings) as a foundational pathway into our school system will ensure even greater kindergarten readiness and school success.

Investment in Pre-K is something the Forsyth County community wants and our young children and families need. And, it's an investment that is already paying off.

It's not a question of whether we should invest, but rather that we simply cannot afford to wait any longer. We must invest in the young learners who will drive and lead Forsyth County forward — for our children, our families, and our entire community.



Discover the power of Pre-K



Today is a big day!

It's the Pre-K graduation ceremony at Mason's school, complete with kid-sized caps and gowns, balloons, and mini Pre-K diplomas. Mason and his friends line up with excitement for their turn to walk across the stage. Parents, grandparents, and other family members fill the house.

Everyone is proud, including Ms. Shawntia, Je'Lisa, Ophelia, and most of all, Chelsea. This school has become like family, and she's looking forward to sending Mason's younger brother here soon. They all know that Mason is more than ready to succeed in kindergarten, which means he's more likely to succeed throughout grade school, go to college, get a well-paying job, and become an engaged and fulfilled adult.

When Mason receives his diploma he runs to his mom — happy, confident, and clearly proud of himself. There are hugs, a few tears, and smiles all around — and the biggest smile is Mason's.

Fast-forward two years: The effects of the Pre-K Model Cohort Classrooms on families are ongoing. Chelsea is now chair of the Policy Council at Family Services, which oversees key aspects of the child development department at Family Services. Mason no longer needed an IEP in kindergarten and now loves learning as a first-grader at the Arts Based School in Winston-Salem. Ms. Shawntia, Ophelia, and Je'Lisa are continuing to teach young learners and engage families, delivering positive experiences and impact for hundreds of other Forsyth County households.

That's the power of Pre-K!



TOGETHER, WE CAN UNLOCK THE POWER OF PRE-K FOR ALL OF FORSYTH COUNTY'S CHILDREN.

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CHILD CARE RESOURCE CENTER

Katura Jackson,
Executive Director

Gena Puckett,
Program Director



FAMILY SERVICES

Khari Garvin,
President and CEO

Kimoorah Bradley,
Family Support
Services Manager



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THE PRE-K PRIORITY

Leslie Mullinix,
Project Director



WINSTON-SALEM/FORSYTH COUNTY SCHOOLS

Dr. Don Phipps,
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Lesa M King Bullins,
Pre-K Equity Coordinator

THE **PRE·K** PRIORITY

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LEARN MORE ABOUT:

Pre-K Registration – PreKPriority.org/register

The Pre-K Model Cohort Classrooms – PreKPriority.org/arpa

Becoming a Pre-K Teacher – PreKPriority.org/befirst

Pre-K in the Workplace – PreKPriority.org/workforce

Family, Friend and Neighbor Network – FFN.PreKPriority.org

The Pre-K Priority is a collaboration of community organizations committed to early childhood education and supported by the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust. Program inquiries should be directed to Leslie Mullinix, The Pre-K Priority Project Director at lmullinix@FamilyServicesForsyth.org

