

2021 LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY PRIORITY

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

It is critical to North Carolina PTA's mission to empower all families with the tools and practices they need to effectively engage in their child's education and development, starting at the earliest stages. High-quality pre-kindergarten programs are critical in preparing high-risk children for success in grades K-12. The advantages of attending Pre-K last throughout elementary school, holding steady for both high and low-income students. Research has shown clear benefits, but many children cannot enroll due to insufficient funding and fees required. Only 23% of four-year-old children in NC have access to Pre-K. This percentage is below the national average. There are nearly 33,000 children who are eligible but not enrolled due to lack of access. Experts suggest that many more eligible children do not even apply due to the long waiting list. Several lower-income counties are forced to refuse state funding because they do not have the funds to cover the difference between what the state pays and the programs' cost.

A child's first years are instrumental to their future development. Children with access to high-quality early education programming show increased graduation rates, higher education attainment, and lower incarceration rates. It's vital to North Carolina PTA's mission to empower all families with the tools and practices they need to effectively engage in their child's education and development, starting at the earliest stages.

North Carolina children need universal access to high-quality pre-schools to prepare them to enter kindergarten and provide a strong foundation throughout school. Universal Pre-K provides lifelong, positive results for children, their communities, and our state.

North Carolina PTA will support initiatives as well as encourage and advocate for legislation and policies that:

- Ensure and implement universal access to high-quality Pre-K.
- Ensure federal and state resources are provided to make early education programs affordable, available, and accessible for low-income families.
- Approve funding to set the child care subsidy-reimbursement rate for qualifying early childhood care and education programs to either the statewide market rate or the established county market rate, whichever is more.
 - In doing so, the statewide market rate would serve as a floor for reimbursing providers and create more significant equity in funding across the state. This will allow communities to recover from COVID-19 and ensure greater sustainability, moving forward more quickly.

- Establish professional standards and provide ongoing training and professional development for early learning and childcare providers.
- Improve and invest in the early childhood educator pipeline.
- Enhance coordination between early childhood education programs and elementary schools to improve the transition for children entering kindergarten.
- Require family engagement policies to develop, implement, and evaluate all early childhood programs, including home visiting programs.