

# The American Rescue Plan Act & Early Childhood in Chatham County

Unlike many other industries, early care and education (ECE) programs never stopped serving during the pandemic and continued to provide stable, nurturing environments for children of essential workers and others in need of care. Still, our ECE programs have been hit hard by the pandemic, which has worsened many of the long-known cracks in early childhood infrastructure in Chatham County and in North Carolina, such as high rates of teacher turnover, the need for more teacher education and development opportunities, the affordability of child care for both providers and parents, and the quality of the built environments of child care facilities.

These issues have converged to create a child care crisis, where workforce shortages and impossibly tight budgets lead to classroom closures, which make it difficult for parents to find affordable and available child care, limiting their ability to participate in the workforce and depriving their children of critical developmental opportunities.

The American Rescue Plan Act provides a historic window of opportunity to invest in ECE programs in Chatham County in a way that both immediately relieves pressure on early childhood providers and parents, and lays the groundwork for long-term transformation of early childhood systems that best support children and their families.

As the community leader in ECE programs in Chatham County, Chatham County Partnership for Children is poised to lead the effort to strengthen and grow our early childhood infrastructure. A commitment from the County to invest 3% of Chatham County's ARPA funds in coordinated and sustained efforts to improve child care in Chatham would allow the Partnership to:

## (1) Conduct a comprehensive study of the early childhood landscape in Chatham, with special attention to programs and services supporting children birth to three (\$100,000)

The Partnership will provide leadership and leverage our network to engage child care providers, early childhood educators, parents, and community partners. We will hire consultants to conduct a community-based, mixed-methods, comprehensive assessment that will allow us to develop an Early Childhood Action Plan and long-term financing model for the county's investment in Early Childhood. We will align our work with the Chatham Education Foundation's Universal Pre-K Supply & Demand study so that the combined outcomes and goals provide a comprehensive plan for birth to five in Chatham focused on equity and supporting those with the highest level of need.

## (2) Provide immediate support to stabilize and strengthen early childhood systems in Chatham to prevent further crisis while we work on long-term systems planning.

Investments in early child systems are an allowed and recommended use of ARP funds. Investments that would have an immediate positive impact on early childhood systems in Chatham include: wage supplements to attract and retain a qualified early childhood workforce; education and credentialing programs for early childhood teachers to repair and expand the pipeline of teachers; bridge funding for parents in the "gap" who lose or do not qualify for child care subsidy benefits, but for whom child care is still unaffordable; and improvements to the physical environments of child care that increase safety and quality.

## 3% FOR THREE & UNDER

Now is the time to invest in Early Childhood in Chatham



Early childhood education programs provide one of the highest returns on investment of any educational spending, and starting earlier has the greatest returns. High-quality programs for disadvantaged children that start at birth can deliver a 13% ROI - higher than the 7-10% ROI for those serving only 3- to 4-year-olds.

(Economics Professor James J. Heckman)



### Zero to 3

Community Assessment & Early Childhood Action Plan for birth to 3



### Workforce

Wage supplements, education, & training to recruit, support, and retain workforce



### Cost of Care

Subsidizing high costs of child care for parents and providers



### ENVIRONMENT

Improving physical infrastructure of early learning environments

