

# North Carolina 2019 Policy Priorities for Infants, Toddlers, and Families

Think Babies™ NC Leadership Team



## *Expand Quality Infant Toddler Child Care Programs*

### Introduction

North Carolina is considered a “child care desert” when it comes to quality infant toddler care. Overall only 18.7% of the infant-toddler population can be served in the existing supply of licensed infant-toddler programs.<sup>1</sup> On average, more than five families with infants and toddlers are competing for every available licensed child care space. Quality infant toddler care can be even more scarce, even in those counties that do offer infant toddler care in existing child care programs.

While finding quality care and learning opportunities for infants and toddlers is a struggle for all families, this shortage creates a crisis for working families who desperately need quality infant toddler care in order to maintain employment and financially support their families. Over 60% of parents of infants and toddlers are working and many rely on quality child care when they return to work, often within days or weeks of giving birth, because they lack family support or other options for caring for their babies.<sup>2</sup>

North Carolina needs a state-level solution to address the acute shortage of quality infant toddler care which exists in almost every county in the state. Although model infant toddler care programs do exist in North Carolina, very few have the necessary resources to expand to meet the parent demand for quality infant toddler care. The child care market alone cannot solve the shortage. Parent fees and child care subsidy rates are not sufficient for child care programs to expand to meet the demand for quality infant toddler care.

### Why Is This Important to Do Now?

#### **Working parents with babies want access to quality infant toddler care.**

In North Carolina, 67% of children under six live in households with all parents working.<sup>3</sup> It's important for working parents to know that they have a stable environment in which to leave their children while they continue to work and increase the financial stability of their families. When quality early care and learning isn't available, parents must make tradeoffs. Some parents work fewer hours or leave the workforce altogether, risking their family's economic security. Others rely on informal, unstable care arrangements that lack important quality components and safety standards that fully meet a child's developmental needs.<sup>4</sup>

#### **Quality infant toddler care is critical to support healthy development for babies.**

A child's brain grows more quickly during the first three years of life than at any other point. Young children, especially infants and toddlers, learn through the relationships they build with their parents and their nonparental early educators. When babies are in infant toddler child care programs, these programs must be high quality with qualified early educators that have the education and skills to nurture these babies and ensure they have a strong foundation for healthy development and learning.<sup>5</sup>

### Child care deserts exist in every county and are even more extreme in rural areas.

In North Carolina, there are 5.3 infants and toddlers for each licensed child care slot, well above the threshold for a child care desert.<sup>6</sup> Almost all, 99 of 100<sup>7</sup>, North Carolina counties qualify as child care deserts with more than three infants and toddlers for every available slot: 74 counties have five or more infants and toddlers per slot and over 90% of these 74 counties are rural Tier 1 and Tier 2 counties.<sup>8</sup> Ten counties have 10 or more infants and toddlers per slot, indicating extreme shortage. All ten counties with an extreme shortage of infant/toddler care are rural Tier 1 and Tier 2 counties (See Figure 2).<sup>9</sup> North Carolina does not

Greatest Undersupply			
County	Infant-toddler Population	Infant-toddler Enrollment	Infants/Toddlers per Available Slot
Hyde	91	3	30.33
Camden	341	17	20.06
Yadkin	1275	67	19.03
Jones	296	18	16.44
Polk	454	28	16.21
Yancey	420	31	13.55
Onslow	11485	859	13.37
Warren	561	49	11.45
Currituck	684	65	10.52
Madison	463	46	10.07

maintain vacancy data at the state level, so available slots are measured by current enrollment. The actual availability may be slightly higher, but is still not adequate for the number of children in the state.

### Even in counties with programs serving infants and toddlers, quality infant care is scarce.

Across the state, there are just 2,382 four- and five-star child care programs serving 44,179 infants and toddlers - which means there is space available for only one third of the 124,838 parents who may need or want licensed infant toddler care programs. Rural areas tend to have the least quality infant toddler care available. Two North Carolina counties—Hyde and Tyrell—have no four- or five-star programs serving infants and toddlers and 28 counties have five or fewer four- or five-star programs serving infants and toddlers. The vast majority of these counties are located in the rural counties in the northeast and western parts of the state. Together, these 30 counties serve only 981 infants and toddlers in high-quality programs, just 6% of their combined infant-toddler population (See Figures 1 and 2).<sup>10,11</sup>

Early Head Start programs, which tend to provide higher quality infant toddler care because of higher program standards including early educator qualifications, are also scarce in North Carolina. Across the state there are just 37 Early Head Start programs<sup>12</sup> serving only 5,429 infants and toddlers.<sup>13</sup>

### A state-level solution is required to increase the supply of quality infant-toddler care because the current child care market cannot fix the supply crisis.

Quality child care programs are expensive because low staff/child ratios and small group sizes contribute to higher personnel costs. Infant care is expensive even though infant toddler teacher wages tend to be very low ---averaging \$9.86 per hour.<sup>14</sup>

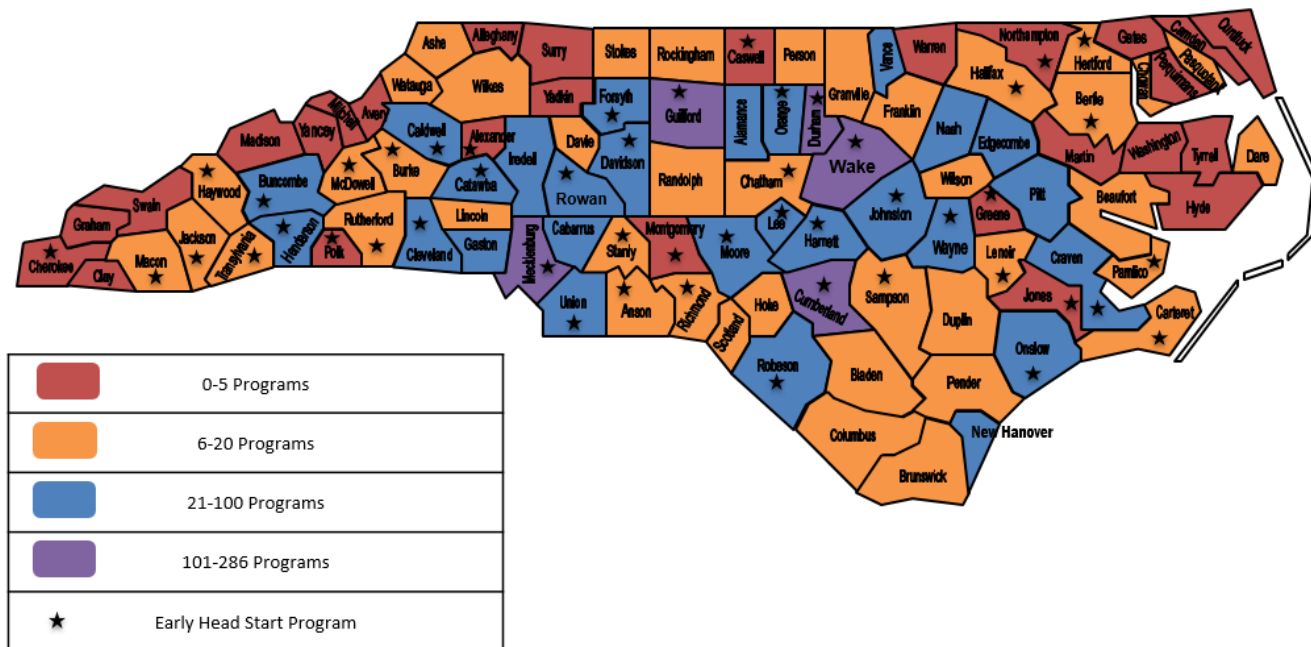
The current child care market, which is funded by parent fees and/or child care subsidies to support child care program operations, cannot adjust to meet the demand. Child care programs are reluctant to charge parents more and cannot generate enough revenue from parent fees alone to cover the higher cost of delivering infant care, which is more than \$9,500 annually.<sup>15</sup>

When subsidy reimbursement rates are low, it creates serious financial hardship for providers. Not all child care programs are willing or able to serve parents receiving child care subsidies, because reimbursement rates often are below the real cost of care. For example, infant toddler subsidy reimbursement rates for a four-star program fall below \$668/per child in 10 rural counties, and average

just \$765 per month in 80 Tier 1 and Tier 2 counties.<sup>16</sup> Child care subsidy funding is also extremely underfunded and without expansion of child care subsidy funding, there are simply few resources for child care programs to expand to serve greater numbers of infants and toddlers in low-income families.<sup>17</sup>



**Figure 1: Four- and Five-Star Programs Serving Infants and Toddlers**



Source: DCDEE, 2018 & DPI, 2018  
 Map prepared by: NC Early Education Coalition

Figure 2: Infant Toddler Child Care Programs in North Carolina

County	2018 Programs		Desert Calculation			County	2018 Programs		Desert Calculation		
	4- and 5-Star Programs	4- and 5-Star Enrollment	Infant-Toddler Population	Infant-Toddler Enrollment	Infants/Toddlers per Available Slot		4- and 5-Star Programs	4- and 5-Star Enrollment	Infant-Toddler Population	Infant-Toddler Enrollment	Infants/Toddlers per Available Slot
Alamance	27	663	5,240	999	5.25	Jones	2	24	296	18	16.44
Alexander	5	77	1,015	206	4.93	Lee	21	184	2,061	483	4.27
Alleghany	1	18	215	62	3.47	Lenoir	13	187	1,759	295	5.96
Anson	16	78	848	145	5.85	Lincoln	18	332	2,527	419	6.03
Ashe	6	101	687	174	3.95	Macon	6	200	1,089	223	4.88
Avery	3	72	435	72	6.04	Madison	4	46	463	46	10.07
Beaufort	17	238	1,543	270	5.71	Martin	4	41	696	131	5.31
Bertie	8	62	485	86	5.64	McDowell	9	125	1,234	180	6.86
Bladen	11	106	1,175	185	6.35	Mecklenburg	286	6,389	42,039	8,513	4.94
Brunswick	14	346	3,047	461	6.61	Mitchell	2	15	445	72	6.18
Buncombe	38	1,044	6,978	1,467	4.76	Montgomery	5	107	901	168	5.36
Burke	16	241	2,141	312	6.86	Moore	16	262	3,096	625	4.95
Cabarrus	25	953	7,173	1,499	4.79	Nash	22	279	2,960	569	5.20
Caldwell	24	266	2,433	405	6.01	New Hanover	31	806	6,743	1,762	3.83
Camden	2	7	341	17	20.06	Northampton	4	28	507	65	7.80
Carteret	7	190	1,638	267	6.13	Onslow	24	591	11,485	859	13.37
Caswell	2	22	684	75	9.12	Orange	42	791	3,954	1,021	3.87
Catawba	26	649	5,539	1,041	5.32	Pamlico	4	33	356	56	6.36
Chatham	18	253	1,891	435	4.35	Pasquotank	14	217	1,452	353	4.11
Cherokee	3	79	579	105	5.51	Pender	16	137	1,834	253	7.25
Chowan	6	28	452	107	4.22	Perquimans	5	45	411	49	8.39
Clay	3	60	186	70	2.66	Person	12	86	1,087	121	8.98
Cleveland	30	411	2,945	574	5.13	Pitt	43	722	7,087	1,445	4.90
Columbus	12	201	2,018	303	6.66	Polk	1	17	454	28	16.21
Craven	40	498	4,019	558	7.20	Randolph	18	402	4,779	624	7.66
Cumberland	107	1,625	15,525	2,483	6.25	Richmond	8	137	1,555	281	5.53
Currituck	2	12	684	65	10.52	Robeson	32	484	5,511	1,052	5.24
Dare	7	74	1,181	148	7.98	Rockingham	9	149	3,064	451	6.79
Davidson	32	638	5,344	893	5.98	Rowan	26	506	4,813	620	7.76
Davie	6	104	1,266	135	9.38	Rutherford	15	220	2,030	291	6.98
Duplin	17	207	2,289	389	5.88	Sampson	14	184	2,597	434	5.98
Durham	149	2,494	12,615	2,879	4.38	Scotland	13	127	1,405	225	6.24
Edgecombe	26	194	1,939	232	8.36	Stanly	18	411	2,149	474	4.53
Forsyth	90	1,522	13,290	2,350	5.66	Stokes	6	118	1,374	189	7.27
Franklin	11	158	1,887	298	6.33	Surry	3	54	2,265	437	5.18
Gaston	45	821	7,815	1,251	6.25	Swain	4	73	563	89	6.33
Gates	4	19	255	40	6.38	Transylvania	7	107	723	110	6.57
Graham	3	35	209	38	5.50	Tyrrell	0	0	81	17	4.76
Granville	14	238	1,681	400	4.20	Union	39	994	7,285	1,478	4.93
Greene	4	36	629	122	5.16	Vance	20	161	1,732	268	6.46
Guilford	143	2,474	18,101	3,984	4.54	Wake	260	6,533	38,767	9,192	4.22
Halifax	14	88	1,471	242	6.08	Warren	4	19	561	49	11.45
Harnett	34	456	5,921	631	9.38	Washington	2	15	566	78	7.26
Haywood	17	284	1,525	389	3.92	Watauga	9	194	1,174	235	5.00
Henderson	27	390	3,211	506	6.35	Wayne	29	465	5,469	963	5.68
Hertford	12	83	688	131	5.25	Wilkes	10	206	1,841	291	6.33
Hoke	11	85	2,752	376	7.32	Wilson	13	508	2,547	659	3.86
Hyde	0	0	91	3	30.33	Yadkin	2	6	1,275	67	19.03
Iredell	27	610	5,304	918	5.78	Yancey	1	21	420	31	13.55
Jackson	12	142	988	170	5.81						
Johnston	42	969	7,079	1,433	4.94						
						<b>Total</b>	<b>2,382</b>	<b>44,179</b>	<b>356,929</b>	<b>66,760</b>	<b>5.35</b>

- 
- <sup>1</sup> Jessen-Howard, S., Malik, R., Workman, S., & Hamm, K. (2018). Understanding Infant and Toddler Child Care Deserts. Center for American Progress.
- <sup>2</sup> Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE), University of California, Berkeley. (2018). Early Childhood Workforce Index 2018: North Carolina.
- <sup>3</sup> NC KidsCount. (2017). Children Under Age 6 with All Available Parents in the Labor Force.
- <sup>4</sup> Jessen-Howard et al, 2018.
- <sup>5</sup> Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. (2010). The Science of Early Childhood Development (InBrief).
- <sup>6</sup> Jessen-Howard et al, 2018
- <sup>7</sup> Clay County, with an infant toddler population of only 186, is the only county that does not qualify as a desert.
- <sup>8</sup> Tiers are designated by the North Carolina Department of Commerce based on each county's economic well-being.
- <sup>9</sup> Jessen-Howard et al, 2018
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>11</sup> North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE). (2018). "Active Program Data."
- <sup>12</sup> National Head Start Association. (2017). North Carolina Head Start Profile.
- <sup>13</sup> Head Start-State Collaboration Office. (2018). *Data*.
- <sup>14</sup> CSCCE, 2018
- <sup>15</sup> Economic Policy Institute. (2016). "The Cost of Child Care in North Carolina."
- <sup>16</sup> DCDEE. (2018). Market Rates-Centers: Effective October 2018. *Data*.
- <sup>17</sup> For additional information see: Think Babies™ Leadership Team. (2019). Increase Child Care Subsidy Funding to Expand Access to High-Quality Infant and Toddler Care.

#### About Think Babies™ NC:

Think Babies™ NC seeks to advance policies that support the healthy development of North Carolina's babies and toddlers. It is aligned with the NC Pathways to Grade-Level Reading initiative and the NC Early Childhood Action Plan. Think Babies™ NC is led by the NC Early Education Coalition with support from the NC Early Childhood Foundation and a Leadership Team of state and local organizations focused on advancing public awareness and policy solutions for infants, toddlers, and their families.