



North Carolina

More at Four

The state's More at Four program serves 4-year-old children who are at risk of school failure. About half of the children are served in public schools and the remainder in Head Start or private child care centers. Programs must operate for at least six hours per day during the school year.

Eligibility

Income: children must come from families with incomes at or below 75 percent of the State Median Income (SMI)—however, 20 percent of a county's slots may be filled with children above 75 percent of SMI if the children display an additional risk factor

Age: 4 years old on or before October 16th of the program year

Priority: children not served by other early education programs, then to children in unsubsidized child care, and then to those in unregulated programs that do not meet More at Four standards

Length of Program

Hours/day: six to six and a half hours per day

Days/year: 180 days

Eligible Providers

Public pre-kindergarten programs, Head Start programs, licensed child care centers

Number Served¹

16,775 (2005-06)

About 50 percent are served in public school settings, 40 percent in private child care programs, and 10 percent in Head Start programs.

Total Annual Budget

\$66,681,270 million in state funds (2005-06)

Monitoring

Programs must report on both programmatic and financial compliance. The local contract administrator must make at least one annual visit to each classroom. Programs are required to conform to guidelines and requirements, and to use one of five recommended curriculums. Lead teachers must have a Bachelor's degree (B.A.) and pursue or hold birth-K or preschool licensure.

¹ For updated figures on the program budget and number served, please see the NIEER State Preschool Yearbook at: <http://nieer.org/yearbook/states/>

Governance

How are state pre-k programs integrated into community-based settings?

The law requires that More at Four build upon existing local school, private child care, and other entities that can establish or expand pre-kindergarten capacity. Decisions related to the integration of pre-kindergarten into community-based settings happen at the local level. The More at Four County (Regional) Planning/Advisory Committee determines the placement of children (slots) across providers that meet specific standards. Such providers may include public school preschool programs, for-profit child care, nonprofit child care, and Head Start. The state provides funds directly to the local contracting agency that, in turn, sub-contracts with community-based providers approved in the local More at Four Plan.

Are there requirements to integrate the state pre-k and subsidized child care programs at the state or local level?

Collaboration is required at the state level with the establishment of the More at Four Task Force. The Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services and the Superintendent of the Department of Public Instruction (or their respective designees) jointly chair the Task Force. It includes representatives from the state and local North Carolina Partnership for Children, Head Start, parents, teachers, providers, and other experts. An Executive Committee, with representatives from the two departments and the partnership, and other non-agency early childhood experts, also convenes for feedback on changes to program and policy. However, neither the Task Force nor the Executive Committee is legislatively mandated to approve policy decisions.

The local More at Four County (or Regional) Planning/Advisory Committee must sign off on a plan that demonstrates support by the key community agencies including public schools; local Smart Start partnerships; county departments of human services, health, and mental health; Head Start; child care resource and referral; private child care providers; and other relevant service delivery organizations. Planning/Advisory committees must be co-chaired by the local superintendent of school and the local Smart Start board chair. The program guidelines require programs to demonstrate successful collaboration with other community agencies on a variety of issues including professional development, accessing resources, serving children with disabilities, and transportation.

Procedures and Supports for Community-based Providers

What are the rules/guidelines for selecting pre-k providers?

The local planning committee is responsible for outreach to early child care and education providers, and local Smart Start chairs have extensive networks and expertise in communicating with the early care community. Local More at Four planning committees select providers with the guidelines established by the state (e.g., licensed center, class size maximum of 18, 1:9 adult to child ratio, appropriately licensed lead teacher).

All programs must meet minimum standards to be considered a More at Four site, and higher standards may be phased in. For example, programs must score an overall average of 4.5 on the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised by the end of the second year. Programs

have four years to meet teacher standards (although minimum standards must be met). There is no on-site review of applicants.

What resources are available to help providers become eligible to deliver pre-k services?

T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Project scholarships are available, and there is a specific line item in the More at Four budget earmarked for More at Four teachers and assistants to participate. In its first year, the program contracted with the University of North Carolina-Greensboro to provide statewide professional development to facilitate the knowledge of specific curricula and further teachers' ability to obtain appropriate licensure. There are currently ten staff members in the More at Four office dedicated to providing assistance on issues like this.

Programs receive \$500 per child for start-up, excluding capital costs. In the 2005-06 budget, the amount totaled \$2.2 million or approximately 3 percent of the More at Four budget.

Do teachers working in community settings earn comparable wages and benefits once they obtain the same credential as teachers in school-based settings?

Yes. More at Four requires pay equity (and comparable benefits) for all teachers with the same credential, regardless of where they teach.

Supports for Working Families

Is there any explicit discussion in the legislation or regulations of extending the day, coordinating with the child care subsidy program, or helping working families?

The Program Guidance explicitly discusses how to layer child care subsidies on top of More at Four funds to provide full-day services. The legislation prohibits More at Four funding to extend the day or year. The program guidance does acknowledge that wraparound services are often critical to the continued success of the child and/or family, and does give first priority for children on a child care waiting list, but does not allow funding to provide full-day care.

What policies help working families access pre-k and other supports?

Breakfast and lunch must be provided at no cost, even if the child is not eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Transportation is an allowable expense, but programs are not required to provide this service. However, programs are required to develop a written plan showing how the transportation needs of potential children will be addressed.

Funding

What is the per-child payment for the pre-k program?

On average, the per-child payment is \$385 per month. The amount varies based on the state's school funding formula, which reflects a school district's relative wealth. More at Four pays about half the cost of providing a high quality pre-kindergarten service to children, and local programs must leverage other sources of funding to sustain the program.

How does the state pre-k funding affect other potential sources of funds for a provider?

The legislation states that the per-child allocation is not intended to pay the full cost of the

program. Recipients are expected to leverage approximately half of the funds necessary to deliver a quality program from other resources. Leveraged sources include child care subsidies, Smart Start, Head Start, Even Start, and Title 1 funds. Head Start programs can receive a full Head Start allotment, and a full More and Four allotment.

For a six-hour program, county social service offices can pay up to 75 percent of the full-day child care rate to the More at Four provider. Up to 100 percent of the subsidy can be requested if the program cares for the child during a full workday. If a program already received other supplemental funding for the six-hour day, programs can request child care subsidies for only the wraparound services (before and after school, and holidays). Parent fees cannot be charged for the More at Four portion of the day, but may be charged for wraparound services.

Sources

- Interview: Carolyn Cobb and John Pruette 3/2006
- Website: <http://www.governor.state.nc.us/Office/Education/Home.asp>
- Legislation: Session Law 2001-424 Sec. 21.76B(g); amended Session Lay 2002-126. See Appendix D in Report to Legislature, January 2003
<http://www.governor.state.nc.us/Office/Education/legislative-report-January2003.pdf>
2003 Legislation - House Bill 397:
http://www.governor.state.nc.us/Office/Education/_pdf/HouseBill397.pdf
- Jan. 2004 Report to Legislature: <http://www.governor.state.nc.us/Office/Education/1-2-04CCJanuary2004LegislativeReport.pdf>
- Jan. 2003 report to Legislature:
<http://www.governor.state.nc.us/Office/Education/legislative-report-January2003.pdf>
- Program Guidelines and Requirements (June 2003):
http://www.governor.state.nc.us/Office/Education/_pdf/ProgramGuidelines.pdf
- Program Monitoring Tool:
<http://www.governor.state.nc.us/Office/Education/Forms/ProgramMonitoringTool.doc>

For information about national trends, read CLASP's *All Together Now: State Experiences in Using Community-Based Child Care to Provide Pre-kindergarten* at http://www.clasp.org/publications/all_together_now.pdf.