

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2021

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HOUSE BILL 262

Short Title: Smart Start Funds. (Public)

Sponsors: Representatives Lambeth, White, Potts, and Adcock (Primary Sponsors).
For a complete list of sponsors, refer to the North Carolina General Assembly web site.

Referred to: Appropriations, if favorable, Rules, Calendar, and Operations of the House

March 11, 2021

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT TO PROMOTE YOUNG CHILDREN'S HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT THROUGH
CONTINUED INVESTMENT IN THE NORTH CAROLINA PARTNERSHIP FOR
CHILDREN, INC., (SMART START) PROGRAM.

Whereas, experiences during early childhood create the foundation for young children's learning, health, and success; and

Whereas, children are born ready to learn but may not have access to the experiences or environments that foster healthy brain development, such as engaged child-parent interaction, quality child care, and excellent health care; and

Whereas, the COVID-19 pandemic has placed stresses on families that threaten children's healthy growth and development; and

Whereas, continued access to affordable, high-quality child care is a critical resource to ensure working parents' ability to participate in the economy as the State recovers from COVID-19; and

Whereas, the COVID-19 pandemic has destabilized child care providers due to reduced enrollments and revenues, threatening their long-term sustainability and families' ability to access care; and

Whereas, the North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc., (Smart Start) serves children from birth to five years of age and works across the State to raise the quality of child care, strengthen families, advance child health and development, and improve early literacy; and

Whereas, Smart Start is a network of 75 nonprofit local partnerships that delivers programs and services for children from birth to five years of age in a consistent, efficient way by achieving strong outcomes that benefit North Carolinians across all 100 counties; and

Whereas, Smart Start programs work to support child care providers and early educators so that formal child care settings are high-quality, safe, and staffed by well-trained, well-compensated professionals; and

Whereas, Smart Start helps families access home visiting, parenting education, and early literacy programs that ensure children grow and learn in nurturing home environments; and

Whereas, Smart Start's health programs promote children's healthy physical and social-emotional development in the early years; and

Whereas, Smart Start has been a vital source of guidance and support for families and early childhood professionals in navigating the challenges presented by COVID-19; and

Whereas, Smart Start local partnerships use community-based, data-driven decision making to improve the health, well-being, and development of children based on the needs and resources of their local communities; and



Whereas, the Smart Start network is led by the North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc., (NCPC) that ensures fiscal and programmatic accountability and coordinates the statewide network to create better outcomes for children and families; and

Whereas, the Smart Start model includes careful fiscal and programmatic oversight of State-funded services administered through local partnerships, and both data and outcomes are reported to the General Assembly annually; and

Whereas, the State's growing population of children aged birth through five years has created additional needs for the programs and services Smart Start provides; and

Whereas, a greater State investment in Smart Start can help ensure that more children begin elementary school prepared to succeed and meet the goal of reading at or above grade level by third grade; Now, therefore,

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

SECTION 1. There is appropriated from the General Fund to the Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Child Development and Early Education, the sum of thirty million dollars (\$30,000,000) recurring for each year of the 2021-2023 fiscal biennium to be allocated to the North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc., (Smart Start) to distribute to Smart Start local partnerships. Funds allocated to the North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc., pursuant to this section shall be used to provide additional funding for the following Smart Start activities or initiatives:

(1) \$15,000,000 for child care–related activities.

(2) \$7,500,000 for family support activities.

(3) \$3,750,000 for health-related activities.

(4) \$3,750,000 for child care subsidy.

SECTION 2. This act becomes effective July 1, 2021.