

WHOLE Community Approach for Child Care in Communities

Activation Plan Report

Henderson County, North Carolina

January 2024

3rd Edition



Acknowledgments

This activation plan is the result of a comprehensive Whole Community Approach, reflecting contributions that began well before its inception. It's shaped by the collaborative efforts of diverse organizations and individuals dedicated to enhancing Henderson County's welfare. We extend special recognition to key contributors: Community Foundation of Henderson County, Henderson County Government, Smart Start Partnership for Children, Henderson County Chamber of Commerce, Children & Family Resource Center, Henderson County Public Schools, Blue Ridge Community College, local employers, child care centers, in-home/family child cares, early education professionals, and various community representatives. Their commitment and insight have been instrumental in shaping this plan, reflecting the spirit and needs of Henderson County, North Carolina

Executive Summary

We are pleased to present the Whole Community Approach Activation Plan Report, which outlines a comprehensive strategy for addressing child care challenges and expanding capacity in Henderson County.

Through extensive data analysis and highly collaborative workshops, we identified numerous opportunities to significantly grow child care infrastructure and access for families in the area. This report details a multi-faceted activation plan focused on three interrelated priority areas:

Finance: The plan puts forward a range of recommendations to strengthen provider sustainability through operating grants, compensation initiatives, targeted supports, and incentives for creating new licensed capacity to serve more families. This combination of financial support mechanisms will help alleviate provider burdens and facilitate capacity growth.

Quality & Outcomes: The plan includes a variety of incentives tied to higher program standards, shared training events to cultivate best practices, and proactive community education campaigns. Together these will drive continuous quality improvements across the local child care system.

Community: A collaborative governance model engaging diverse public and private stakeholders will be essential to maximize existing resources and investments. Raising awareness and coordinating efforts across sectors will be pivotal to success.

Specifically, the plan offers current providers program development grants focused on business skills enhancement and quality improvements. Additionally, new licensed providers will receive milestone-based start-up grants, incentivizing the creation of more slots in underserved communities. Ongoing sustainability will be reinforced through targeted operating supports.

The plan also puts forward highly innovative approaches to developing child care real estate, such as collaborative EarlyEd FlexPlex shared facilities. It further highlights utilizing incentive grants focused on supporting development of expanded and needed care spaces throughout the area.

Robust organic talent pipelines, shared training events for providers, and strategic partnerships with employers and educational institutions will significantly strengthen skills and infrastructure. Highly coordinated efforts between city, county, and state agencies will champion greater community awareness, impactful advocacy campaigns, and optimized engagement with North Carolina's Pre-K program and other early learning investments.

This plan provides a detailed roadmap for building a truly comprehensive child care system in Henderson County through integrated strategies promoting financial sustainability, continuous quality enhancements, and increased capacity. We eagerly look forward to collaborating closely with you to bring this ambitious yet achievable vision to reality for families and children throughout Henderson County.

Public-Facing Benefit Statement for Henderson County's Child Care Initiative

Nurturing Growth, Empowering Families, Strengthening Community: Henderson County's Commitment to Early Childhood Excellence

In Henderson County, our future shines brighter when our youngest minds receive the best start in life. Our comprehensive initiative to support provider community development and organic talent in child care represents a transformative step towards enhancing the readiness of our children, supporting our families, and ensuring a reliable workforce.

1. **Readiness of Children:** At the heart of our initiative is the commitment to improved school readiness. Through professional development programs like Family & Consumer Sciences (FACS) and the Child Development Associate® (CDA) certification, we are equipping child care providers with the knowledge and skills essential for nurturing early learning. Our children will benefit from high-quality care and education, ensuring they step into their school years ready to learn, grow, and thrive.
2. **Support of Families:** Recognizing the pivotal role families play in early childhood development, our approach includes leveraging the existing work with children and families by numerous agencies in our county and region. These initiatives aim to elevate community awareness about the importance of quality child care, fostering a supportive environment where families feel empowered and informed. We also are learning more about innovative options to create new opportunities for care options that meet the diverse needs of care throughout our area. One way is through development of space for child care – removing the burden of facilities to smaller child care businesses providing services to unmet needs in our community.
3. **Workforce Reliability:** Our strategic partnerships with Henderson County Public Schools, Smart Start Partnership for Children, and Blue Ridge Community College, are creating a robust network for professional growth and talent development in the child care sector. By nurturing a pipeline of skilled professionals through educational opportunities and practical exposure, we are ensuring a future of dedicated, well-trained child care providers. This initiative not only enhances the quality of child care today but secures a reliable, skilled workforce for tomorrow.

Join us in this endeavor to mold a brighter future for our children, support our families in their vital role, and strengthen the reliability of our workforce. Together, we are building a foundation of success and well-being for Henderson County.

Background

Child care in communities is a critical issue that demands comprehensive solutions to safeguard the well-being and development of children. In Henderson County, North Carolina, community stakeholders have united to develop an Activation Plan that squarely addresses the challenges and opportunities facing child care and early education in the region. This concerted effort emphasizes a WHOLE Community Approach, recognizing the pivotal role of engaging all sectors of society in establishing a supportive and sustainable child care system.

The local area has harnessed the collective strength of a dynamic group of community leaders and representatives, supported by robust organizational leadership in the field of early education, to delve into the challenges facing child care in the community. Like many other regions, Henderson County grapples with a range of child care issues, from staffing shortages on the supply side to affordability challenges for families. Extensive research and analysis by the Children & Family Resource Center and Smart Start of Henderson County have shed light on these impacts.

In early May 2023, Business of Child Care facilitated a multi-day workshop aimed at identifying opportunities and desired outcomes for child care in Henderson County. The workshop brought together various stakeholders, including providers, employers, educators, and civic representatives, to collectively explore challenges, potential solutions, and key aspirations.

During the workshop, participants prioritized three crucial areas that would drive the success of future endeavors: Finance, Quality & Outcomes, and Community. Participants recognized the pressing need to address operating costs within child care facilities, putting forth suggestions such as enhancing pay scales, improving benefits, and achieving a more favorable expense-to-income ratio for child care providers. Another essential outcome highlighted was the imperative of community education and awareness about the importance of quality child care. Workshop attendees emphasized the significance of public recognition and the effective utilization of local resources, proposing collaborative partnerships and bolstered professional development within the child care sector to elevate service quality.

The workshop also emphasized the critical importance of optimizing and expanding engagement with the NC Pre-K and 4-year-old investment program. Participants engaged in fruitful discussions centered around the establishment of a sustainable and coordinated talent pipeline development strategy, ensuring a continuous supply of well-trained child care professionals for the future.

The desired outcomes identified during the workshop encapsulate various dimensions, including opportunities for improved benefits, enhanced partnerships with local businesses and organizations, increased allocation of resources from schools, improved school readiness for children, greater recognition from the broader community, access to grants and financial support, the ability to provide a living wage, investment in facilities for early care (0-2 age group), and the implementation of talent pipeline programs. These outcomes collectively strive to enhance child care services within the local community, fostering an environment conducive to the optimal growth and development of children.

At a macro level, the focus of this current effort is best summarized as follows:

1. Finance: The workshop participants recognized the need for increased financial support to sustain and expand child care services. To address this, a series of mechanisms were proposed,

including operating supports, program development grants, and funding from yet undefined sources.

2. **Quality & Outcomes:** The participants acknowledged the importance of promoting high-quality child care programs. Collaboration and talent development were identified as essential components for achieving this goal. The plan includes providing support for existing child care providers and programs, incentives for new child care businesses, and expanding engagement with NC Pre-K and 4-year-old investments.
3. **Community:** The workshop emphasized the need for a whole community approach, involving various stakeholders, to ensure the success of the Activation Plan. It was recognized that raising community awareness about the importance of early education, coordinating community connections, and spearheading new initiatives would be key to achieving sustainable child care in Henderson County.

The Activation Plan aims to leverage various mechanisms and strategies to support child care and early education in Henderson County. By adopting a **WHOLE Community Approach**, the plan seeks to engage the entire community in addressing the challenges faced by child care providers and families.

The following pages provide background and beginning activation steps for each component of the Whole Community Approach Activation Plan. **This has been updated from the original publication to reflect community feedback and updated focus from community leaders through December 2023.**



Community Awareness & Advocacy



To address child care challenges and support the growth of early education in Henderson County, a collaborative effort between Children and Family Resource Center (CFRC), Smart Start Partnership for Children, and Community Foundation of Henderson County is well-positioned to serve as the driving force for the initiative.

By combining their unique strengths and community connections, these three organizations will work together to actively engage with child care providers, stakeholders, and the community. They will foster real-time interactions and understanding among all parties.

Leveraging their collective existing structure and expertise, the collaborative will coordinate community connections, keep stakeholders informed and engaged, raise supporting funds, and spearhead new initiatives. A key focus will be on promoting community awareness of the importance of early education.

To establish a solid foundation for organization, fundraising, and the promotion of opportunities, the collaborative will utilize the existing 501(c)(3) non-profit status of CFRC and Community Foundation of Henderson County rather than creating a new legal entity. This approach ensures efficiency and facilitates attracting contributions and investments to support child care efforts in Henderson County.

The initiative has already completed initial steps within the local area:

1. **Comprehensive Needs Assessment:** The community conducted an in-depth evaluation of the current state of early education and child care in Henderson County. Through surveys, focus groups, and data analysis, existing organizations, initiatives, gaps, and areas for improvement were identified.
2. **Formation of a Core Team:** A dedicated team, consisting of educators, parents, community leaders, and local officials, was established to drive the initiative. The core team has played a vital role in shaping the collaborative opportunity.

3. **Definition of Mission and Outcomes:** Through extensive discussions, consultations, and community input, the desired outcomes for the initiative have been collaboratively defined. These outcomes align with the community's specific needs and aspirations, focusing on promoting child care, early education, and supporting children and families.

To further enhance the collaborative's role, the following additional steps should be considered:

4. **Finalization of the Strategic Plan:** A comprehensive strategic plan for the initiative will be developed, detailing objectives, strategies, and actions. This plan will identify target audiences, fundraising goals, promotional activities, and initiatives to support child care efforts. It will serve as a roadmap for the collaborative's activities and guide decision-making processes.
5. **Securing Funding:** The collaborative will take a leadership role in securing funding for child care initiatives in Henderson County. This may involve exploring various funding sources, such as grants, donations, fundraising events, and partnerships with local organizations. A budget will be created to align with the expected development investment.
6. **Establishing a Governance Structure:** The collaborative will establish a governance structure, such as an advisory group or governing body, to oversee the initiative. Roles, responsibilities, and selection criteria for individuals with relevant expertise and community connections will be defined. Regular meetings will be scheduled, and procedures for decision-making and accountability will be put in place.
7. **Facilitating Marketing and Communication Strategies:** The collaborative will develop branding, a website, and promotional materials to raise awareness and engage the community. Communication channels, such as social media and email newsletters, will be established to keep stakeholders informed and engaged.
8. **Monitoring and Evaluating Progress:** The collaborative will implement a system to monitor activities and evaluate their impact on the community. Feedback will be collected, and the effectiveness of programs and initiatives will be assessed. Regular reviews of the mission and outcomes will ensure continued relevance and alignment with Henderson County's needs.

By leveraging their combined strengths through this collaborative approach, CFRC, Smart Start, and Community Foundation of Henderson County will establish a strong foundation for leading child care and early education efforts throughout Henderson County, North Carolina.

Supporting Provider Community Development:

Organic Talent Development

Quality & Development Collaboration

Supporting Quality Capacity

Leverage existing professional development offerings and other resources to provide additional support for provider community development. This also elevates support for school readiness with better working relationships.

1. Shared Training & Development Opportunities
2. Continued Development of Opportunities in Schools for Careers



Organic Talent Development Opportunities

- Community Education
- Family & Consumer Sciences (FACS)
- Child Development Associate® (CDA)
- Higher Education

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To enhance professional growth and development among child care providers in Henderson County, the community can utilize existing professional development offerings and resources. This initiative aims to provide additional support to the provider community, ultimately leading to improved school readiness and stronger working relationships.

One approach is to explore organic talent development opportunities that empower both new and existing providers with the knowledge and skills necessary to deliver high-quality care. This can involve leveraging existing programs such as Family & Consumer Sciences (FACS) in local schools and the Child Development Associate® (CDA) certification. These programs provide valuable training and educational resources that enhance providers' competencies and understanding of best practices in early childhood education.

A collaborative approach can be adopted to organize workshops, seminars, and informational campaigns aimed at raising awareness and knowledge among families and the broader community about the importance of quality child care. These initiatives highlight the value of early education and its impact on school readiness, fostering a supportive environment that recognizes the critical role of child care in children's development.

To further support quality capacity, the local area can establish shared training and development opportunities in partnership with Henderson County Public Schools, Smart Start Partnership for Children, Blue Ridge Community College, and Children & Family Resource Center. This collaborative approach encourages providers to share their expertise and experiences, creating a supportive network for professional growth. By participating in training sessions, workshops, and knowledge-sharing events, providers can learn from one another and collectively enhance their practices.

Additionally, prioritizing ongoing development opportunities in schools, facilitated by Henderson County Public Schools, can expose students to potential careers in the child care field. By engaging schools and educators, young individuals can gain early exposure to the child care profession, fostering interest and understanding of the opportunities available. This collaboration between child care providers and schools strengthens the talent pipeline, ensuring a future generation of well-trained professionals.

Activating these opportunities requires strategic planning and coordination. By leveraging the expertise and resources of education partners, Henderson County can create a supportive ecosystem that empowers providers, enhances school readiness, and promotes the importance of quality child care in the community.

Here is the potential first five steps to initiate the implementation of a local organic talent development opportunities and community education initiative:

1. **Needs Assessment and Goal Setting:** Conduct a comprehensive needs assessment in collaboration with Henderson County Public Schools, Smart Start Partnership for Children, Blue Ridge Community College and Children & Family Resource Center along with other potential partners. Identify the specific professional development needs of child care providers and the community education gaps. Establish clear goals and objectives for the initiative based on the assessment findings.
2. **Partnership Formation and Agreement:** Establish formal partnerships and secure agreements with collaborating partners. Define the roles, responsibilities, and commitments of each partner in supporting the talent development and community education efforts. Ensure alignment of goals and foster a collaborative approach.
3. **Resource Identification and Allocation:** Identify the necessary resources, both financial and material, to support the initiative. Seek funding opportunities from local, state, and federal sources, as well as potential grants and sponsorships. Allocate resources strategically to ensure effective implementation and sustainability.
4. **Curriculum Development and Adaptation:** Collaborate with Blue Ridge Community College and education partners to develop and adapt relevant curricula for Family & Consumer Sciences (FACS) and Child Development Associate® (CDA) programs. Tailor the curriculum to meet the specific needs and goals of the local provider community. Ensure alignment with industry standards and best practices in early childhood education.
5. **Program Implementation Planning:** Develop a detailed implementation plan that outlines the key milestones, timelines, and responsibilities for executing the organic talent development opportunities and community education initiatives. Engage stakeholders, including child care providers, educators, families, and community leaders, to gather input and feedback during the planning process. Define the communication channels, evaluation mechanisms, and strategies for ongoing program monitoring and adjustment.

Program Development Grants for Existing Child Care Programs

Program Development Grants
Sustaining our Licensed Capacity

Reimagine & Refresh Opportunities for Existing Child Care Programs
Recognize & resource existing child care businesses with supports and local funding to revitalize and update program components.

1,284 Active Enrollments
\$385,200 Potential Investment

Business Experience	Quality Experience
\$150 per licensed slot Experiences that focus owners and operators on exercises that help them ensure their businesses are set up for success and sustainability. Awards are often general use.	\$150 per licensed slot An opportunity for programs to increase their quality rating and receive additional incentives for their effort. These awards are often quality materials focused.

Ongoing Technical Assistance & Business Supports

 **Business of Child Care**

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The Program Development Grants aim to reimagine and refresh existing child care programs by providing resources and support to recognize and revitalize these businesses. With 1,284 active enrollments and a potential investment of \$385,200, these grants seek to sustain licensed capacity and enhance program quality. The grants offer two key experiences: the Business Experience and the Quality Experience.

Business Experience: This experience focuses on helping child care owners and operators strengthen their businesses for long-term success and sustainability. By allocating \$150 per licensed slot, the grants enable participants to engage in exercises and activities that enhance their business management skills. The funds can be used for general purposes, supporting various aspects of their operations.

Quality Experience: To promote higher program quality, the grants provide an opportunity for child care programs to increase their quality ratings and receive additional incentives. With \$150 per licensed slot, programs can invest in quality materials and resources that enhance the learning environment and overall program experience for children. These awards are specifically targeted towards improving program quality and ensuring positive outcomes for the children in their care.

These grants not only inject much-needed funds into existing child care businesses but also offer ongoing technical assistance and business support to help providers navigate challenges and build a strong foundation for success. By investing in program development and quality improvement, these grants contribute to stabilizing and strengthening the local child care network.

The program development grants align with the goal of utilizing available funding to support providers' individual business needs, enhance program sustainability, and drive positive outcomes for both

providers and the children they serve. Through these grants, Henderson County can reimagine and refresh its existing child care programs, creating a thriving and high-quality child care landscape.

The activation items for implementing the Program Development Grants in Henderson County are as follows:

1. **Grant Application and Guidelines:** Develop a comprehensive application process and guidelines for child care providers interested in accessing the Program Development Grants. Clearly outline the eligibility criteria, required documentation, and deadlines for submission. Communicate the availability of grants and provide detailed information on how providers can apply.
2. **Review and Selection Committee:** Establish a committee comprising representatives from relevant stakeholders, such as child care experts, education professionals, and community leaders. This committee will be responsible for reviewing grant applications, assessing their alignment with the program's objectives, and selecting recipients based on the criteria outlined in the guidelines.
3. **Disbursement of Funds:** Develop a transparent and efficient process for disbursing grant funds to selected child care programs. Establish clear timelines and procedures for funds distribution, ensuring that recipients receive the allocated funds in a timely manner. Maintain accurate records of fund disbursement for accountability and reporting purposes.
4. **Technical Assistance and Business Support:** Design and implement a comprehensive technical assistance and business support program for grant recipients. This program should provide ongoing guidance, resources, and training to help providers address operational challenges, enhance business management skills, and ensure long-term sustainability. Collaborate with local partners and other entities to leverage existing resources and expertise.
5. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Establish a monitoring and evaluation framework to assess the effectiveness and impact of the Program Development Grants. Regularly collect data and feedback from grant recipients to evaluate the outcomes, identify areas for improvement, and make necessary adjustments to enhance the success of the program. Use this feedback to inform future grant cycles and ensure continuous program enhancement.

Incentives for New Licensed Child Care Programs

Program Development Grants

Incentives for New Licensed Capacity

Incentives for New Licensed Child Care Programs
Target increased licensed care for micro-needs by creating a local start-up grant and support program. As new licensed care is created, this can also support transition of unlicensed care.

Goal:
10% Increase of 0-5s
with sole/both parents working
in child care over 3 years

From 1,254 to 1,638, an increase of 384 children in child care.

128 new slots each year

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Program Development Grants

Incentives for Licensed Capacity


128 New Slots
\$2,000 per new slot
\$256,000 Investment

Milestone Funding Approach

New licensed child care businesses are eligible for community-based grant funding of up to \$2,000 per new expected licensed slot. Program grants are capped at \$30,000. Funds are designed for purchases related to program equipment & material and business technology.

There are key grant funding milestones that provide funding support upon completion:

1. Business Exploration & Model Exercise – 15% of grant award
2. Environmental Setting Scan & Survey Exercise – 25% of grant award
3. Licensing Application & Approval – 40% of grant award
4. North Carolina Quality Attainment – 20% of grant award

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The Incentives for New Licensed Child Care Programs aim to target the creation of additional licensed child care capacity, particularly for families with children aged zero to five whose parents are working. By increasing the percentage of children in care from 35% to 45%, an estimated 400 additional slots would be required. To achieve this goal, a three-year plan is proposed, with an annual increase of over one-third in capacity.

These incentives provide financial support to new licensed child care businesses through a local start-up grant and support program. The grants can be used to facilitate the transition of unlicensed care and promote the establishment of new licensed care options. The specific incentives can take various forms,

such as general incentives or those tied to types of programming. The grants are often awarded on a milestone basis, providing providers with opportunities to receive funding as they progress in developing a sound child care business and achieving quality standards.

For each new expected licensed slot, eligible child care programs can receive up to \$2,000 in community-based grant funding, with a maximum cap of \$30,000 per program. This funding will support the start-up and operational costs of new child care businesses, encouraging their successful launch and sustained operation. By incentivizing the creation of new licensed child care programs, the goal is to increase the capacity for child care in the community, meeting the needs of working families.

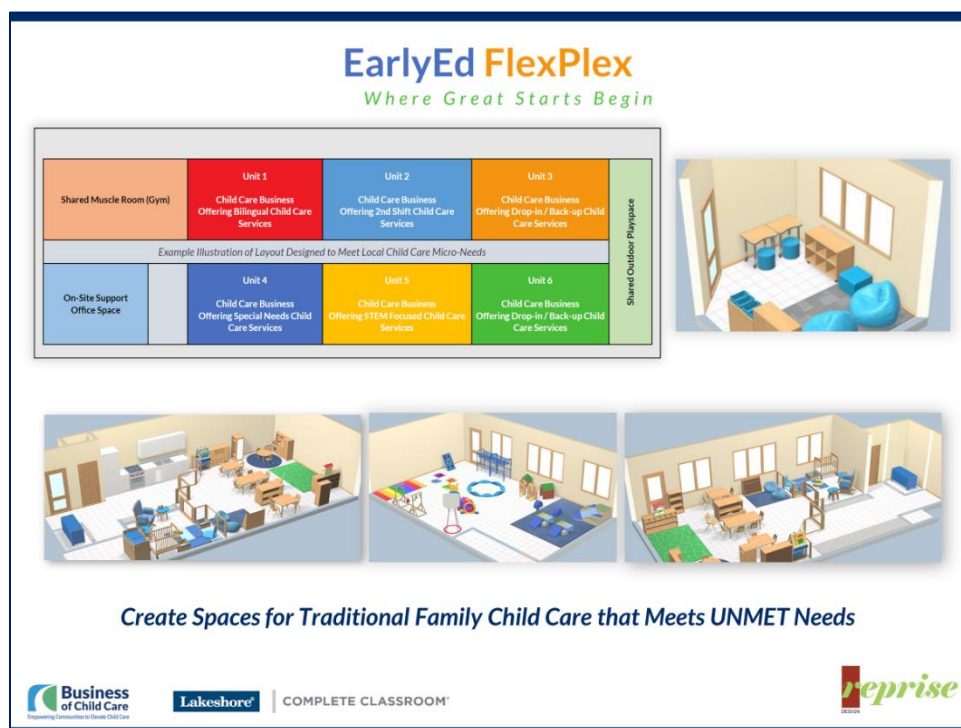
Throughout the grant process, there are key milestones that provide funding support upon completion. These milestones include the Business Exploration & Model Exercise, Environmental Setting Scan & Survey Exercise, Licensing Application & Approval, and the attainment of a recognized quality rating. Each milestone represents a crucial step in the development and quality improvement of the child care program, and funding is allocated accordingly.

By offering these incentives, the community seeks to build a strong child care community in Henderson County, creating opportunities for increased access to high-quality child care for families and supporting the overall well-being and development of young children.

The potential activation items for implementing the Incentives for New Licensed Child Care Programs in Henderson County are as follows:

1. **Develop a Three-Year Plan:** Create a detailed plan outlining the strategies and actions required to increase licensed child care capacity by over one-third each year for three years. This plan should consider factors such as funding allocation, resource allocation, community partnerships, and program development.
2. **Establish the Start-Up Grant and Support Program:** Design and implement a local start-up grant and support program to provide financial assistance to new licensed child care businesses. Define the eligibility criteria and guidelines for accessing the grants, including the maximum grant amount per program and the specific milestones that need to be achieved to receive funding.
3. **Promote and Market the Incentives:** Launch a targeted marketing and awareness campaign to inform potential entrepreneurs and existing providers about the incentives available for establishing new licensed child care programs. Utilize various communication channels such as social media, local publications, and community events, to raise awareness and generate interest.
4. **Develop a Milestone-Based Funding Process:** Establish a structured funding process that provides financial support upon completion of key milestones. Define the milestones, such as the Business Exploration & Model Exercise, Environmental Setting Scan & Survey Exercise, Licensing Application & Approval, and Quality Rating Attainment, and allocate funding accordingly to incentivize progress and quality improvement.
5. **Streamline Application and Approval Procedures:** Create a user-friendly application process for child care providers interested in accessing the incentives.

Create Community Space for Child Care



The EarlyEd FlexPlex is an innovative shared facility model that provides quality child care through collaboration of multiple small providers. Developed by Business of Child Care, the EarlyEd FlexPlex allows 4-6 individual child care businesses to operate in a shared building. This reduces overhead and regulatory burdens, expanding access in underserved areas.

Providers operate dedicated spaces for up to 12 children each. They share common indoor activity and outdoor play areas. The model facilitates peer training, support, and networking in a professional community. Shared administrative efficiencies reduce operating costs for small business owners, who earn competitive wages through models defined prior to opening that are sustainable for the operator.

Ideal for communities, the FlexPlex increases capacity where large centers may not be feasible. It's an attractive option for economic and workforce development, with capital costs often supported by public/philanthropic sources. The community orientation and collaborative format also appeal to social sector funders.

Regulatory approval was recently granted for the first FlexPlex project in Yadkin County, North Carolina. This will help address a major shortage in child care slots for a community population of 37,000. The local Shallow Ford Foundation initiated the project after the school superintendent highlighted the need. Community leaders are now engaged in planning and implementation.

Key steps in developing a FlexPlex include:

1. **Discovery Process:** The discovery process involves assessing the local child care landscape. This includes analyzing supply/demand data and gathering input from parents, providers, agencies and other stakeholders. They identify potential facilities to repurpose or land to build new. Costs are estimated for purchase, construction, equipment, and startup.
2. **Engage Local Leaders:** A diverse working group of community stakeholders forms to create a shared vision, objectives, operating model and implementation roadmap. The team secures participation commitments from key partners including local government, businesses, social sector funders and service providers.
3. **Raise Capital Funding:** The working team determines the full capital campaign goal based on facility and equipment costs. They identify sources such as government/foundation grants, corporate sponsorships, and community initiatives. Proposals are activated with partner commitments to raise funds.
4. **Secure Facility:** Once capital is committed, the team can secure ownership or long-term lease of an existing property to repurpose or construct a new facility. The building remains a community-owned asset managed by a nonprofit or public entity.
5. **Launch Facility:** With desired outcomes as a guide, identify and onboard participating providers in collaboration with local licensing and early education support agencies.

Supporting Sustainment of Capacity: Operating Supports

Operating Support Funds

Supporting Sustainment of Capacity

\$481,000
\$3,000 Per Slot – 160 Operating Subsidies

Critical-Needs Operating Support
This support is structured to provide ongoing funding for child care slots that meet a pre-defined critical need in the local community.

This is an example where employers can participate too!

Quality Operating Support
This support is structured to provide ongoing funding for child care slots that meet a pre-defined level of quality through the state QRIS.

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To ensure the sustainability of child care capacity in Henderson County, several operating support programs are proposed. By offering operating supports, the community aims to alleviate financial burdens on child care providers, support the sustainment of existing capacity, and ensure families have access to affordable, high-quality child care options. These supports serve as vital mechanisms to enhance the overall child care landscape and address critical needs within the community.

The **Critical Needs Operating Support** is intended to address identified gaps in the local community. This offering will support child care programs that offer services to meet critical needs, such as second-shift care, special needs care, bilingual care, and other micro or unmet needs. The support amount may vary depending on the specific needs of each program. Additionally, this support can be tied to quality improvement efforts, incentivizing providers to enhance the quality of their services.

The **Quality Operating Support** is structured to support child care slots that meet a predefined level of quality through the state's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). Programs that achieve a recognized level of quality in their operations will receive ongoing financial support through this offering. The support aims to reward and encourage providers to continually improve the quality of their care.

Approximately 65% of the funding allocation, amounting to \$481,000 after the first year, can be directed towards targeted operating supports.

By utilizing a portion of this allocation, it is estimated that around 160 child care slots can be subsidized with up to \$3,000 per slot. These supports provide financial relief for families and help offset the cost of child care, making it more accessible and affordable. The specific allocation and targeting of supports can be adjusted over time to meet evolving needs and priorities within the community.

As this proposal moves forward, it is essential to gather feedback, reflections, and thoughts from stakeholders to refine and tailor the operating support programs to best meet the needs of Henderson County.

To ensure the successful implementation of the operating support programs and maximize their impact in Henderson County, the following activation steps are proposed:

1. **Establish a Support Implementation Team:** Form a dedicated team comprising representatives from key stakeholders, including child care providers and other relevant community organizations. This team will oversee the planning, coordination, and implementation of the operating support programs.
2. **Develop Program Guidelines and Criteria:** Collaboratively define the eligibility criteria and guidelines for the Critical Needs Operating Support and Quality Operating Support. This includes identifying the specific critical needs to be addressed, determining the quality standards for the Quality Operating Support, and outlining the application and review process for providers interested in participating.
3. **Establish Funding Allocation Mechanisms:** Work with financial experts and stakeholders to establish a transparent and equitable funding allocation mechanism for the operating supports. Consider factors such as the number of slots to be subsidized, the specific support amount per slot, and the frequency and duration of support payments.
4. **Outreach and Education:** Launch a comprehensive outreach and education campaign to inform child care providers and the community about the availability and benefits of the operating supports. This campaign should highlight the eligibility criteria, application process, and the positive impact that supports can have on providers, families, and the overall quality of child care services in Henderson County.
5. **Application and Selection Process:** Develop a streamlined application process for child care providers interested in receiving the operating supports. Implement a fair and objective selection process that includes thorough review and evaluation of applications based on the defined criteria. Ensure clear communication with applicants regarding the status of their applications and provide support for those who may need assistance during the process.

Expand Employer Investment

Expand Employer Investment Build Sustaining Local Contributions

Find opportunities for Community to Participate

Philanthropy

Local employers can expand investment in child care through philanthropic initiatives like direct grants to providers, donations to early childhood organizations, quality improvement sponsorships, and financial assistance funds for families. This charitable giving helps improve affordability, quality, and access.

Fee-for-Service Opportunities

Employers can also invest in child care through fee-for-service partnerships with providers by covering portions of tuition, reserving slots, extending hours, lowering co-pays for lower-wage workers, and encouraging quality through incentives. These arrangements serve employers and employees while supporting child care providers.



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Local employers can play a crucial role in supporting and sustaining high-quality child care in their communities through philanthropic initiatives and direct fee-for-service partnerships with providers. Employer contributions in these areas can help address gaps in public funding, make child care more affordable and accessible for working families, encourage quality improvements, and support business needs.

Direct grants from employers to local child care centers and family child care providers can improve facilities, purchase supplies and learning materials, offer staff training, and keep tuition costs affordable. Donations to nonprofits and coalitions devoted to early childhood education provide funds that can be distributed to providers, offer training and technical assistance, advocate for policy changes, and more. Employer sponsorship of quality improvement programs gives providers coaching, mentoring, and resources to achieve higher standards of care. Underwriting financial assistance funds makes child care more affordable for lower-income families and increases access and stability. Supporting capital campaigns to construct or renovate facilities helps address the barrier of inadequate space for expanding capacity.

In addition to philanthropic contributions, employers can invest in child care more directly through fee-for-service partnerships. Contracting with centers to reserve slots guarantees care availability for employees' children. Subsidizing a portion of tuition on an ongoing basis reduces employees' out-of-pocket costs. Paying providers to extend hours or offer back-up care accommodates non-traditional work schedules and supports workforce participation. Covering a portion of tuition for lower-wage employees while requiring co-pays based on income promotes affordability. Providing extra assistance for employees who use providers that meet quality standards encourages quality improvements. Developing on-site centers offers maximum convenience for employees.

Here is the potential first five steps to initiate the development of expanded employer investment:

1. Conduct a survey of major local employers to assess interest and gather input on child care needs and possible partnerships. Gather data on the number of employees with young children, typical work schedules/hours, interest in various partnership models, concerns about employee absenteeism or retention due to child care challenges, willingness to dedicate philanthropic or fee-for-service dollars, etc.
2. Identify 3-5 leading employer leaders willing to serve as champions to encourage peer participation. Look for employers that already view child care as an important talent issue, have extensive community involvement, and can serve as role models. Ideally recruit diverse industries and sizes.
3. Create focus from the champion group to identify first areas to target for focus on outcomes needed for employers to find value. One example might be 2nd shift care offerings. Have the champions weigh in on greatest pain points and potential "quick wins." Consider convening employee focus groups. Develop 2-3 priority projects that align with business interests.
4. Develop a case statement outlining return on investment for businesses to use child care partnerships as a talent recruitment and retention strategy. Quantify impacts on absenteeism, turnover, recruitment, productivity based on research. Model different contribution levels and expected community-wide benefits. Tie outcomes to employer goals.
5. Meet with the champion group to present the opportunity and gain feedback and buy-in. Refine proposals based on discussions. Determine appropriate next steps for broader employer outreach based on reactions.

Through a combination of philanthropic and fee-for-service initiatives, employers can collaborate with child care providers to make high-quality, reliable child care more financially feasible for working parents. This serves the needs of both employees and businesses.

Expanding Engagement of NC Pre-K and 4-Year-Old Investments



Expanding North Carolina's Pre-K program and investing in high-quality care for all 4-year-olds is a critical long-term strategy for building child care capacity and infrastructure. While state and federal pre-k investments provide a strong foundation, a comprehensive approach looks beyond funding allocations to the broader systems and resources needed for access, quality and outcomes.

A community-wide approach optimizes these public investments by coordinating efforts of the early education system - providers, agencies, schools, health services, family supports, and workforce pipelines. This requires looking holistically at facility needs, educator recruitment and training, data integration, enrollment coordination, and program quality standards. It means bringing together stakeholders across sectors to maximize resources.

Sustained public engagement and advocacy is also key to expanding pre-k and early learning investments over time. Communicating the profound, long-term impacts on child development, educational outcomes and community growth will build public will. Policymakers must hear that their constituents support expanding high-quality, accessible pre-k as an economic and social imperative.

This long-term, multi-sector approach - with broad engagement - ensures pre-k investments fully deliver on the promise to provide every child with a solid start. Communities can help lead the way in optimizing resources and building model programs.

Action steps are best determined locally for this initiative.

Considerations for Funds and Investments

To address the need for increased investment in Henderson County's child care system, it's crucial to explore diverse funding sources. The local workforce, integral to the booming tourism industry, often faces financial constraints due to low wages. This impacts their ability to afford essentials like housing, food, and child care. While investments from employers benefiting from quality child care systems are valuable, they might not suffice.

Other communities have effectively utilized local taxes and various funding mechanisms to bolster child care initiatives. By adopting similar strategies, Henderson County can show its dedication to supporting families, fortifying the workforce, and fostering the development and well-being of young children. Thoughtful fund allocation is key to building a sustainable, effective child care system that aligns with the needs of working families and contributes to the community's overall economic health and growth.

Here are three examples of how communities have successfully implemented local taxes to support early education or child care:

1. Multnomah County, Oregon: In May 2021, voters approved a ballot measure to fund universal preschool for all 3- and 4-year-olds in the county through a progressive income tax on individual income above \$125,000 and household income above \$200,000. The county will use these funds to expand access to preschool for all children in a mixed-delivery system including public schools, new and existing child care centers, and home-based child care providers.
<https://www.americanprogress.org/article/state-local-wins-illustrate-national-demand-early-learning-investments/>
2. New York City, New York: In June 2022, the city announced a plan to provide free, full-day, high-quality early childhood education to all 3-year-olds and 4-year-olds by 2025. The plan includes a new tax on the wealthiest New Yorkers to fund the expansion of early childhood education programs.
<https://on.nyc.gov/Childcare>
3. City of Warren, Minnesota: Local community steps up to help solve child care shortage with Little Sprouts Learning Center expansion. Construction of the \$2.6 million city-owned childcare center will be financed in part with a one-half cent local sales tax and the remainder through grants, loans and donations.
<https://www.agweek.com/business/city-of-warren-steps-up-to-help-solve-child-care-shortage-with-little-sprouts-learning-center-expansion>