

Office of Head Start Full Enrollment Initiative

WNCSource received notification in February of 2023 that we were being placed on a full enrollment plan. The results of how we met the plan should be provided to us within the next few weeks. There is the prospect of lost funding for our Head Start and Early Head Start programs. We have certainly taken the plan to heart and worked with the Office of Head Start (OHS) through Training and Technical Assistance and the submission of Changes in Scope. Below is a list of steps we have taken and accomplishments as we work towards full enrollment:

- Increased front line teaching employees from 43 to 72 in the last twelve months
- Increased the number of children enrolled in HS and EHS from 217 to 329.
- Hired a full-time staff recruiter
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- Raised teacher pay by as much as 26%
- Provided retention, hiring and referral bonuses
- Supported staff work/life balance with the addition of afterschool teachers

When we receive notice of next steps, sanctions, or reductions in funding, we will have the opportunity to respond. Rocky Cabagnet, our agency attorney, has experience in working through sanctions from OHS. We may also ask for help from Fieldsman Leifer LLP, a national law firm that works with Head Start grantees. The consultants at Foundations for Families may also be available to help us craft a response. As we receive information, and respond, we will keep the WNCSource Board fully informed.

“WHOLE Community Approach to Child Care”

In January 2024 Business of Child Care, a consulting organization from Minnesota, published a report titled *WHOLE Community Approach for Child Care in Communities*. This is an “Activation Plan Report” for Henderson County, NC. Here is a [link](#) to that report. This was part of a broader effort by Smart Start, the Children and Family Resource Center, Blue Ridge Community College and the Henderson County Public Schools to focus attention on the childcare crisis in Henderson County. Margit Nelson, Children’s Services Operations and Procurement Manager, represented WNCSource at many of these meetings. Some of the highlights of the report include:

- Organic talent development
- Shared training and development opportunities for staff
- Support for childcare businesses
- Outreach to local employers to subsidize childcare

WNCSource is already working with Blue Ridge Community College and other colleges on talent development. Fifteen of our Early Childhood staff are currently working on degrees or other staff credentials. We are also paying for several of our Childcare Partner Early Head Start (CCP) teachers to receive their Child Development Associates. Our recruiting efforts certainly line up with the Organic talent development strategy.

We currently provide shared training experiences for our CCP partners. We are certainly open to expanding training opportunities to other providers. Our CCP program already helps support four childcare businesses in Henderson County. We also believe there is the opportunity to work with large employers in Henderson County on childcare solutions. All this is to say, I believe WNCSource can play a major role in making the Whole Community Approach to Childcare a reality.

Universal Pre-K in Henderson County

On January 17 the Henderson County Early Childhood Task Force met at the Children and Family Resource Center. I had run into McCray Benson, CEO of the Community Foundation of Henderson County and made sure I had an invitation to the meeting. The first item on the agenda was Henderson County Schools Superintendent Mark Garrett talking about universal Pre-K in Henderson County. He has a vision of every elementary school in Henderson County having a pre-k room to serve four-year-old children in the next six to seven years. I listened politely up until the point he said he preferred for them to be school system employees. At that point I did have to point out that WNCSource already has NC Pre-K classrooms in five of the Henderson County Public Schools. I also pointed out that WNCSource has provided Head Start and NC Pre-K services in Henderson County for decades. By the end of meeting Mark Garrett and I were selected to serve on a committee looking at universal pre-k for Henderson County.

Over the last fifty years WNCSource has positioned itself to be recognized as the highest quality provider of early childhood education in our service area. We have been a very progressive Head Start and Early Head Start grantee. We certainly want to be at the table as improvements in the childcare system in Henderson County are discussed. We currently serve 350 infant, toddler and preschool children in Henderson County. This makes us the largest provider of these service in Henderson by at least a factor of three. I am certainly looking to the WNCSource Board for support and guidance as we look to do our part to improve early childhood education in Henderson County and western North Carolina