

# Childcare 101:

## Navigating North Carolina's Early Childhood System Toolkit for Families

Early Childhood Education in North Carolina is crucial for the overall development and future success of our youngest citizens. High-quality early educational experiences yield significant positive outcomes for preschoolers, parents, guardians, educators, and community stakeholders. These outcomes include enhanced cognitive abilities, improved social skills, and better preparedness for future educational endeavors. These outcomes are inclusive for all children, ensuring equitable access to quality education.

### Importance of Early Childhood Education in North Carolina

- **Cognitive Development:** Early education fosters critical thinking and problem-solving skills.
- **Social Skills:** Children learn to interact positively with peers and adults, developing crucial social and emotional skills.
- **Future Preparedness:** Early learning lays the groundwork for academic success, ensuring children are ready for the demands of kindergarten and beyond.
- **Inclusive Learning Environments:** Ensuring that all children, regardless of their background or abilities, have access to high-quality education. Inclusion promotes a sense of belonging and respects the diverse needs of each child.

### State-Funded Programs and Community-Based Initiatives

- [NC Pre-K Program](#): Provides free pre-kindergarten education to eligible four-year-olds. This program focuses on preparing children for kindergarten by enhancing their academic and social skills.
- [Smart Start](#): A public-private initiative that funds early childhood education and health programs. Smart Start focuses on early learning, family support, and health services for children from birth to age five.
- [NC Research and Referral Council](#): Offers financial assistance for child care to low-income families. This subsidy helps families afford quality child care, which is essential for children's development and parents' ability to work or attend school.

### Key Agencies and Organizations

- [North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education \(DCDEE\)](#): Manages child care licensing, child care subsidies, and other early childhood programs. DCDEE is responsible for ensuring that child care providers meet state standards for health, safety, and education.
- [North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation](#): Works to build a foundation for children from birth through age eight. The foundation collaborates with partners to advance policies and practices that improve early childhood outcomes
- [North Carolina Head Start Association](#): Supports Head Start programs, which provide comprehensive early childhood education, health, nutrition, and parent involvement services to low-income children and their families.

## Pivotal Role in Early Childhood Ecosystem

- **Active Participation:** Families play a crucial role in their children's early education by actively participating in their learning and development. There needs to be a partnership with the educator.
- **Advocacy and Support:** Parents and guardians can advocate for quality early childhood education and support their children's educators and programs.
- **Staying Connected:** Home-school connection is vital. Use tools like newsletters, informal conversations at the end of the day, and apps such as Brightwheel, Canvas, Remind, Twitter, Class Dojo, and ReadyRosie (part of teaching strategies) to stay informed and engaged.

## Overview of the Toolkit

This toolkit provides a comprehensive overview of essential elements, resources, and activities required for high-quality early childhood education. It offers guidance on educational settings, childcare options, and resources available to young learners and their families.

### Equity and Inclusion

- **Equitable Access:** Ensure all children have access to quality early childhood programs regardless of socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, or ability.
- **Inclusive Practices:** Implement inclusive practices in the classroom that cater to the diverse needs of all children, including those with disabilities and those from different cultural backgrounds.
- **Cultural Competence:** Educators and families should work together to respect and celebrate cultural differences, incorporating diverse cultural perspectives into the curriculum.
- **Supportive Environments:** Create safe, supportive, and nurturing environments where every child feels valued and included.

By focusing on these critical aspects, families can help ensure their children receive the best possible start in their educational journey.

### Childcare 101 for Families: Webinar Overview

- **Quality Early Childhood Education:** Understanding the core components of high-quality early education, including curriculum design, classroom environment, and teacher-child interactions, and their impact on child development.
- **Updates to North Carolina's QRIS:** Exploring the latest enhancements to the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) and how they affect childcare providers. QRIS provides a standardized method for assessing, improving, and communicating the level of quality in early and school-age care and education programs. [Link to QRIS](#)
- **North Carolina's Early Childhood System Overview:** An overview of the state's early childhood education system, including key agencies and programs such as NC Pre-K, Smart Start, and Head Start.
- **Funding Opportunities and Grants:** Identifying available funding sources and grant opportunities to support early childhood education initiatives. This includes federal, state, and private funding options.
- **Reporting Structures in Childcare:** Understanding the reporting requirements and structures within the childcare system. This section covers mandatory reporting for child abuse and neglect, compliance with

licensing regulations, and data collection for program evaluation.

- **Head Start Program Benefits:** Highlighting the benefits of the Head Start program, which promotes school readiness for young children from low-income families through agencies in their local community.
- **Financial Aspects and Subsidies:** Exploring the financial aspects of childcare, including available subsidies and financial support for families. This includes information on how to apply for subsidies and the criteria for eligibility.
- **Staff Qualifications and Training:** Emphasizing the importance of staff qualifications and ongoing professional development. This includes information on required certifications, degrees, and continuous training opportunities.
- **Community Resources and Support:** Identifying community resources and support systems available to educators, children, and families. This includes local health and human services, mental health resources, and family engagement programs.

## Objectives:

- **Understand the Childcare System:** Gain a comprehensive understanding of the childcare system in North Carolina, including the roles of various agencies and how they interact.
- **Emphasize Quality Care and Professional Development:** Highlight the importance of providing quality care and the role of professional development in achieving this goal. This includes strategies for maintaining high standards and engaging in lifelong learning.

## Equity and Inclusion in Preschool Classrooms

Ensuring equity and inclusion in preschool classrooms is crucial for providing every child with equal opportunities to thrive. As parents and families, understanding and supporting these efforts can significantly impact your child's educational experience. Below are key strategies and resources specifically designed to help families understand their role in fostering equity and inclusion:

### Diverse Representation

It is essential for children to see themselves and others positively represented in the materials they encounter at school. Diverse representation in books, activities, and curriculum materials reflects children's identities and backgrounds, helping to foster a sense of belonging and acceptance.

### Resources for Families

- [Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning \(CSEFEL\)](#)
- [Families First: Supporting Social and Emotional Development](#)

### Cultural Competence

Cultural competence involves understanding and respecting cultural differences and integrating them into daily interactions and learning experiences. Parents can support cultural competence by sharing family traditions, languages, and practices with educators to enrich the classroom environment.

- [Families First: Supporting Social and Emotional Development](#)

## Inclusive Environment

Creating a classroom atmosphere where every child feels valued and respected is fundamental. Families can contribute by communicating openly with educators about their child's unique needs and experiences and participating in activities that celebrate diversity and inclusion.

- [Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning \(CSEFEL\)](#)

## Family Engagement

Family engagement is a critical component of equity and inclusion. By actively participating in your child's education and partnering with educators, you can help ensure that your child's cultural practices and values are recognized and supported in the classroom. Regular involvement in school activities and open communication with teachers can create a more cohesive learning experience for your child.

- [Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning \(CSEFEL\)](#)

## Family Resources Overview

### Diverse Representation:

- [Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning \(CSEFEL\)](#)
- [Families First: Supporting Social and Emotional Development](#)

### Cultural Competence:

- [Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning \(CSEFEL\)](#)

### Emotional/Social Development

- [Families First: Supporting Social and Emotional Development](#)

By embracing these strategies and utilizing the resources provided, families can play an active role in creating a more equitable and inclusive environment in preschool classrooms, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to succeed.

## Funding and Grants:

- [North Carolina Pre-K \(NC Pre-K\)](#)
- [Child Care Subsidy Program](#)

## Community Resources:

- [Smart Start & The North Carolina Partnership for Children](#)
- [Child Care Resource and Referral \(CCR&R\)](#)

## Tools for Family Engagement

PBS KIDS, the leading educational media brand for children ages 2-8, provides opportunities to explore new ideas and worlds through TV, digital media, and community programs. PBS KIDS, along with local stations nationwide, supports the entire learning ecosystem, including teachers, parents, and communities.

- [PBS KIDS](#): Provides interactive games, videos, and activities designed to enhance early learning
- [PBS North Carolina](#): Offers a variety of educational resources and programs for young learners.
- [Sesame Workshop](#): Resources for emotional well-being and social skills.
- [Bright by Text](#): Text messages with tips and resources for early childhood development.
- [PBS LearningMedia](#): Educational resources including videos and interactive lessons for various subjects.
- [PBS KIDS for Parents](#): Provides parents with information and resources to help them raise happy, healthy, smart, and kind kids.
- [Guide to Choosing a Preschool or Childcare Center](#)

### PBS KIDS Social Media

- [Facebook](#)
- [Tumblr](#)
- [X \(Formerly Twitter\)](#)
- [YouTube](#)

### Games Exploring Feelings and Emotions

- [Sesame Workshop Feelings Tic-Tac-Toe](#)
- [Daniel Tiger's Guess the Feeling Game](#)
- [PBS Kids Mad Feeling](#)
- [NC Financial Assistance](#): Explains financial assistance options for child care in North Carolina.
- [Key indicators](#) of high-quality care:
  - A language-rich environment
  - Age-appropriate curricula and stimulating materials in a safe physical setting
  - Warm, responsive interactions between staff and children.

### Links to View the 360° Tours of a 5-Star Accredited Preschool Center

- [Playground](#)
- [Classroom 4 \(Preschool\)](#)
- [Classroom 3 \(Preschool\)](#)
- [Classroom 2 \(Toddlers\)](#)
- [Classroom 1 \(Infants\)](#)

### Conclusion

This toolkit aims to provide families with the necessary information and resources to ensure the highest quality of early childhood education for North Carolina's young learners. By leveraging this toolkit, families can gain insights into best practices, innovative strategies, and effective approaches to support their children's learning and development.

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