

Cooper Announces \$805 Million In COVID Funding For Early Care And Learning Programs

By Donna Martinez

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Governor Roy Cooper announced a historic, one-time federal \$805 million investment in North Carolina's early care and learning child care programs. The North Carolina Child Care Stabilization Grants, made possible by funding from the 2021 American Rescue Plan Act, will support working families with access to high-quality, affordable child care. The grants will also help early care and learning programs with recruitment and retention, enabling them to provide better wages and benefits to teachers, and promoting equity for all—children, parents, and teachers. “The past year has emphasized how critical early child care is for children’s development and parents who need to work. This help for quality child care will get more parents back into the workforce,” said Governor Cooper. “Available and accessible child care is a critical component of a sound basic education for our children.” “Early childhood teachers provide the partnership and expertise families need to ensure the intellectual, social, and emotional development of their infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.” said Susan Gale Perry, Deputy Secretary of the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. “Unfortunately, many cannot afford to stay in the profession. Without higher salaries and benefits—and access to professional development—we won’t have enough early childhood teachers to help raise our children and our economy. I encourage all eligible providers to apply for this funding.”

“The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the gaps that exist in our care infrastructure and reinforced how critical child care and early childhood educators are to the success of working families and the economy as a whole,” said Congressman David Price (NC-04). “I am proud that the American Rescue Plan included \$805 million in federal funding to help stabilize this critical industry in North Carolina. I look forward to seeing childcare providers across the state utilize these much needed resources as Congress works toward building an equitable child care system that works for all families through the Build Back Better Act.”

“As a child care director, we are thrilled that the Child Care Stabilization Grants are here to provide relief during COVID-19. We have been surviving for the last 18 months, now we feel like we will have an opportunity to sustain the essential early care and education services needed by our children and their families,” said Anna Mercer-McLean, Director of Community School for People under Six. “CSPU6 values its great staff; and will be using these funds to increase base salary rates, improve health benefits, provide mental health support, complete needed facility improvements to sustain our program, and maintain healthy and safety at the center.”

The Community School for People Under Six is a community-based, multicultural day school that serves the Carrboro/Chapel Hill area. Their mission is to provide high quality early care and education for all children, specifically low and middle income families, while providing advanced educational opportunities for teachers. The school offers educational growth opportunities focused on multicultural learning and family support through education and programs.

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All private, licensed early care and learning programs are eligible to apply, including for-profit and not-for-profit, family child care homes, and faith-based centers. Child Care Stabilization Grants can enable programs—overwhelmingly women-owned small businesses—to invest in the resources and supports they need to thrive for years to come. Programs that apply and receive stabilization grants may use the funds for a range of activities including: personnel costs; mental health supports; payments for rent, mortgage, utilities, facility maintenance, or insurance; personal protective equipment (PPE); equipment and supplies; and goods or services necessary to maintain or resume child care.

The NC Economic Development Strategic Plan identifies access to high-quality early care and learning as a key strategy for building North Carolina's economy. Employers benefit when working parents know their children are receiving quality care in a healthy environment. They are more likely to stay in the workforce, and are more productive and focused at work. These funds will ensure that classrooms remain open to children, supporting parents as they pursue the educational and career goals that could lead them to better opportunities.

Administered by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services' Division of Child Development and Early Education, the application for Child Care Stabilization Grants application launches on October 11, 2021.

This new investment follows the more than \$300 million in emergency funding that was directed toward the early care and learning system since March 2020 to help families, teachers, and programs stay resilient during the COVID-19 crisis.