Smart Start of Forsyth County

COMPASS
EVALUATION AND RESEARCH, INC.

Community Needs Assessment:

Strengthening Early Childhood Systems in Forsyth County

2025

Prepared by:

Lesa King Bullins, EdS

Director of Research and Evaluation,
SMART start of Forsyth County

&

Sarah Heinemeier, PhD
Compass Evaluation and Research, Inc.

Prepared for:

Smart Start of Forsyth County
Board of Directors,
Community Partners and Stakeholders,
Funding Organizations,
community members,
and Policy Makers

Assessment Scope:

Children Ages 0-8 and Their Families

Purpose:

To assess early childhood system capacity and identify strategic investment priorities for strengthening services from birth through third grade in Forsyth County, North Carolina.

Table of Contents

4 Methodology

7 Executive Summary

8 Overview of Smart Start of Forsyth County

9 Service Area Demographics and Population Trends

16 Child and Family Needs

18 Early Care and Education Resources

20 Community Strengths and Assets

23 Analysis and Key Findings

27 Strategic Recommendations

28 Conclusion

29 Appendix: Zip Code Data Tables

30 References

Methodology

Assessment Framework

The assessment employed a mixed-methods approach using the HOPE family toolkit framework as the foundational structure:

- High-Quality Nurturing Environments
- Healthy Transitions
- Family Stability
- Health
- Hope

Building on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, the assessment examined early childhood influences across multiple system levels.

Data Collection Strategy

Primary Data Collection: Community assessment surveys were conducted with early childhood system stakeholders (n=41), including Smart Start staff, service providers, and childcare providers. The survey was designed to provide qualitative context and stakeholder perspectives to validate and explain patterns found in quantitative data sources.

Secondary Data Integration: Comprehensive data was collected from 24 government and research sources including the U.S. Census Bureau, North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Early Years NC, and specialized early childhood research repositories.

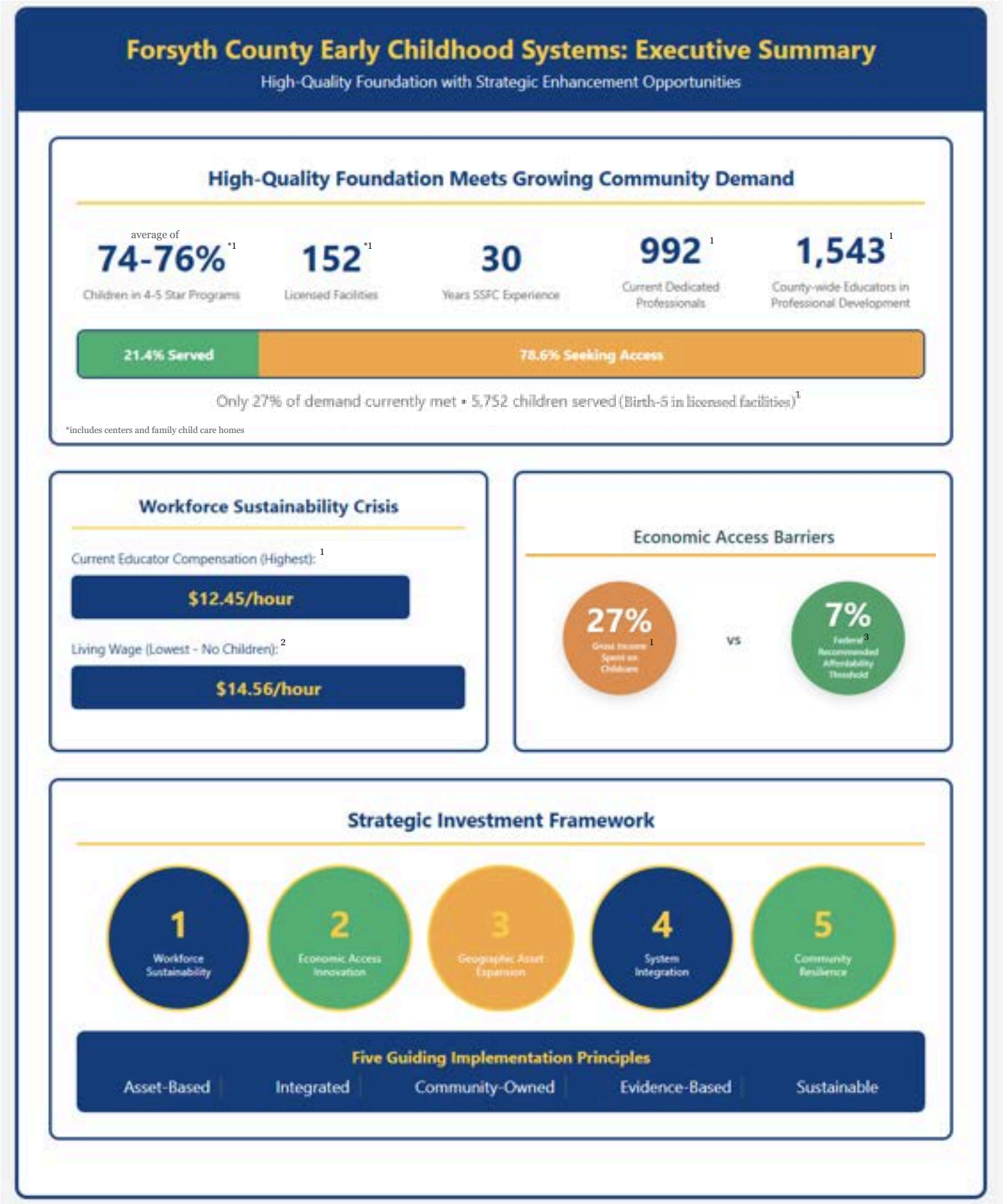
Analytical Approach and Triangulation

The assessment employed systematic triangulation of quantitative data with qualitative survey findings to identify where stakeholder experiences validate, explain, or reveal gaps in statistical patterns. For example, survey identification of navigation challenges helps explain why only 102 non-English childcare referrals occurred despite 29.9% Hispanic children—revealing significant service gaps that numbers alone cannot capture. Similarly, survey respondents identifying access barriers and transportation challenges provide context for why service utilization rates remain low despite available programs. This triangulation approach ensures that community-level statistics are interpreted through the lens of community perspectives and professional expertise.

Limitations

While the survey provides valuable stakeholder insights and successfully validates quantitative trends, the sample size (n=41) limits generalizability. The findings represent the perspectives of service providers and professional staff rather than a statistically representative community sample. Broader community input would strengthen future assessments, particularly direct input from families receiving or seeking services. Some secondary data sources span multiple years (2018-2025), which may not fully reflect current conditions, particularly in the post-pandemic environment. The assessment team addressed this limitation by prioritizing the most recent available data and identifying trends over time.

Executive Summary



[1] Early Years NC. (2025). Early Childhood Program Enrollment and Outcome Data. [2] Massachusetts Institute of Technology. (2025). Living Wage Calculator. [3] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2016). Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Final Rule. 81 Fed. Reg. 67438.

High-Quality Foundation Meets Growing Community Demand

In Forsyth County, 152 licensed early childhood facilities have built a high-quality system where an average of 74-76% of enrolled children attend 4-5 star programs[5], supported by Smart Start of Forsyth County (SSFC) as the coordinating backbone organization. However, this proven excellence serves only 21.4% of children under six (5,723 children) while 78.6% of families actively seek access, indicating substantial unmet community need and system underutilization relative to demand. Families struggle with childcare costs consuming 27% of gross income for single parents[5], creating a gap between quality programming that exists and community access to it.

Three Strategic Enhancement Needs

1 Workforce Sustainability Crisis

Current educator wages of $11-12.45 hourly fall short of living wage needs[7], creating workforce turnover that limits system capacity. However, existing professional development infrastructure serving 1,543 educators county-wide provides a strong foundation for comprehensive workforce sustainability initiatives.

2 Economic Access Barriers

With 24% of children under 5 in poverty and 41.2% in single-parent households[10], market-rate care at $845-1,036 monthly[5] creates affordability barriers. Current systems meet only 27% of families seeking access due to both capacity constraints and enrollment barriers including affordability, transportation, and navigation challenges, forcing alternatives including tripled homeschool enrollment and 70% reliance on informal care arrangements.

3 Educational Continuity Enhancement

Despite strong early intervention (6.1% vs 5.8% statewide)[6] and 100% compliance with required transition planning for children with special needs, third-grade reading remains at 29% versus 49% statewide[8], with 32.1% chronic absenteeism[8][9] indicating service accessibility challenges persist through elementary grades. Geographic analysis confirms varied educational engagement patterns across areas with concentrated economic challenges.

Distinctive Community Assets Enable Strategic Solutions

Proven Infrastructure

Thirty years of Smart Start organizational stability, extensive collaborative networks, and demographic consistency through 2035 (29.9% Hispanic children with established community presence[10]) provide optimal conditions for sustained investment with predictable returns. integration improvements.

Targeted Investment Opportunities

Economic analysis identifies zip codes 27101, 27105, and 27107 where concentrated need (poverty rates 20.8%-27.8%) combines with established community networks exceeding 21,000[10] residents each and multilingual capacity, creating optimal conditions for resource-efficient service expansion and peer navigation development.

Quality Excellence

The current system demonstrates proven capacity for maintaining exceptional standards with an average of 74-76% of enrolled children in 4-5 star programs across 152 licensed facilities, while simultaneously managing demand from 78.6% of families seeking access. This operational track record of quality delivery under pressure provides the expertise necessary for strategic expansion that builds on rather than compromises existing achievements.

[5] Early Years NC. (2025). Early Childhood Program Enrollment and Outcome Data. [6] Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2025). Kids Count Data Center. [7] Massachusetts Institute of Technology. (2025). Living Wage Calculator. [8] North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. (2025). School Performance and Demographic Data. [9] My Future NC. (2025). Chronic Absenteeism Dashboard
[10] U.S. Census Bureau. (2025). American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Strategic Investment Framework

Five interconnected priorities maximize existing strengths while addressing critical needs:

1 **Workforce Sustainability: Enhance compensation and career pathways building on professional development infrastructure serving 1,543 educators**
Focus: Compensation enhancement, career pipeline development

2 **Economic Access Innovation: Develop sustainable financing utilizing established coordination mechanisms to address affordability barriers while supporting provider sustainability**
Focus: Diversified funding, employer engagement, transition support

3 **Geographic Asset Expansion: Leverage demographic stability and community networks for targeted service delivery in zip codes with concentrated need and community assets**
Focus: Community engagement, multilingual capacity, peer navigation

4 **System Integration: Streamline navigation while maintaining expertise through coordinated systems building on proven collaborative capacity**
Focus: Coordinated entry, information sharing, integrated case management

5 **Community Resilience: Address community stress indicators through asset-based approaches complementing professional service delivery**
Focus: Community leadership development, multi-generational support networks

Implementation Framework: These five interconnected priorities operate through five guiding principles that maximize Forsyth County's established strengths: Asset-Based Development, Integrated Approach, Community Ownership, Evidence-Based Enhancement, and Sustainable Systems.

The Path Forward: Transforming Access While Preserving Excellence

Forsyth County's proven quality delivery, collaborative expertise, and demographic stability create unique advantages for comprehensive early childhood system enhancement. Coordinated investment building on existing foundations can transform access while maintaining quality excellence, addressing fundamental sustainability challenges that currently prevent families from accessing the proven infrastructure the community has built over three decades.

Success requires strategic investment that moves beyond service coordination toward structural accessibility, leveraging community assets for long-term transformation. With targeted enhancement of workforce sustainability, economic access models, community engagement, system integration, and community resilience, Forsyth County can ensure broad community access to quality programming while honoring existing excellence and creating lasting system improvements for current and future generations.

I. Overview of Smart Start of Forsyth County

History and Mission

Smart Start of Forsyth County (SSFC) has served as a cornerstone of early childhood development since 1994 as the local affiliate of North Carolina's Smart Start initiative. The organization's mission centers on promoting equitable access to quality, comprehensive early childhood development and education in response to community needs.

SSFC functions as both a direct service provider and a backbone organization coordinating a network of specialized partners. The organization employs approximately 30 highly skilled professional staff with expertise in early childhood education, family support, program management, and community engagement. SSFC directs the vast majority of resources directly to programs with minimal administrative overhead, ensuring funding translates into tangible benefits for children and families. Services are delivered through a distributed model that brings programs directly to communities where families live, work, and seek services rather than requiring families to travel to centralized locations.

Partnership Network

SSFC's effectiveness stems from its extensive network of Direct Service Providers (DSPs) and community partners. Core partners include Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools, Family Services, Child Care Resource Center, Imprints Cares, The Parenting PATH, Center for Exceptional Children, Early Years, and more. These partnerships leverage each organization's specialized expertise while SSFC provides coordination and strategic funding. Beyond formal DSPs and community partners, SSFC maintains collaborative relationships with numerous healthcare providers, mental health agencies, libraries, faith communities, and civic organizations to ensure comprehensive family support and service coordination. Major collaborative initiatives include Pre-K Priority coalition, Forsyth County for Grade-Level Reading, Thriving Together Forsyth, and Action4Equity---all demonstrating sustained commitment to cross-sector collaboration addressing systemic early childhood challenges. SSFC actively participates in these initiatives, ensuring early childhood investments align with broader community development goals while maximizing resource efficiency.

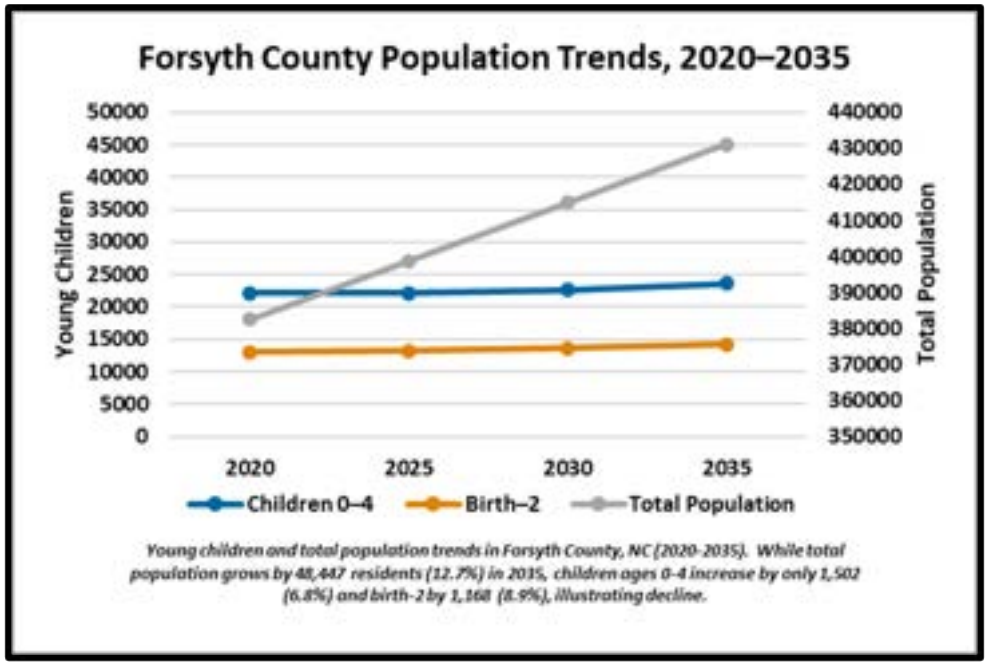
Service Area and Programs

SSFC serves the entirety of Forsyth County's approximately 407.9 square miles, encompassing urban Winston-Salem, suburban communities, and rural areas.

The comprehensive program portfolio includes NC Pre-K serving 797 children in 30 classrooms, family support services including childcare referrals for 633 families annually, and professional development serving 1,543 educators across the county in 2024.

Specialized programs include Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, various family support structures, childcare quality improvement systems, and workforce development initiatives addressing the early childhood educator pipeline.

II. Service Area Demographics and Population Trends



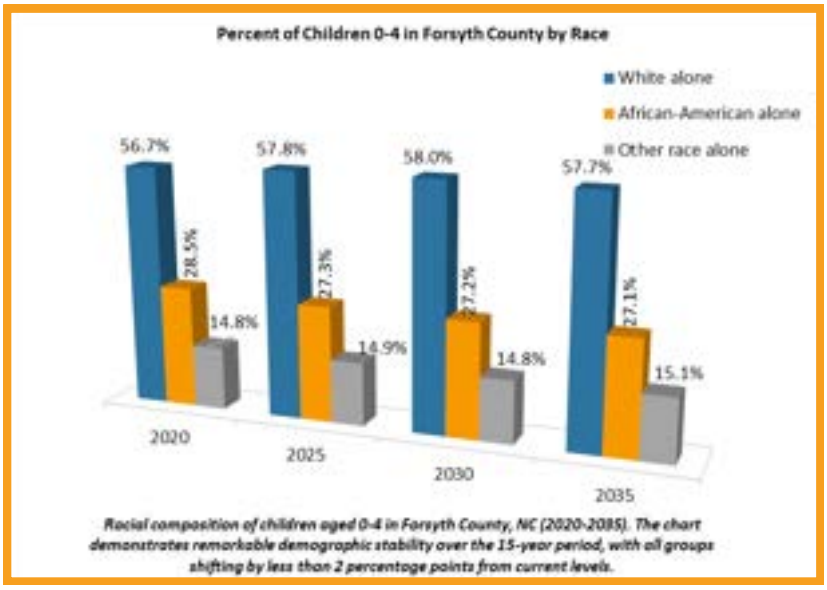
Young children and total population trends in Forsyth County, NC (2020-2035). While total population grows by 48,447 residents (12.7%) in 2035, children ages 0-4 increase by only 1,502 (6.8%) and birth-2 by 1,168 (8.9%), illustrating decline.

Population Overview

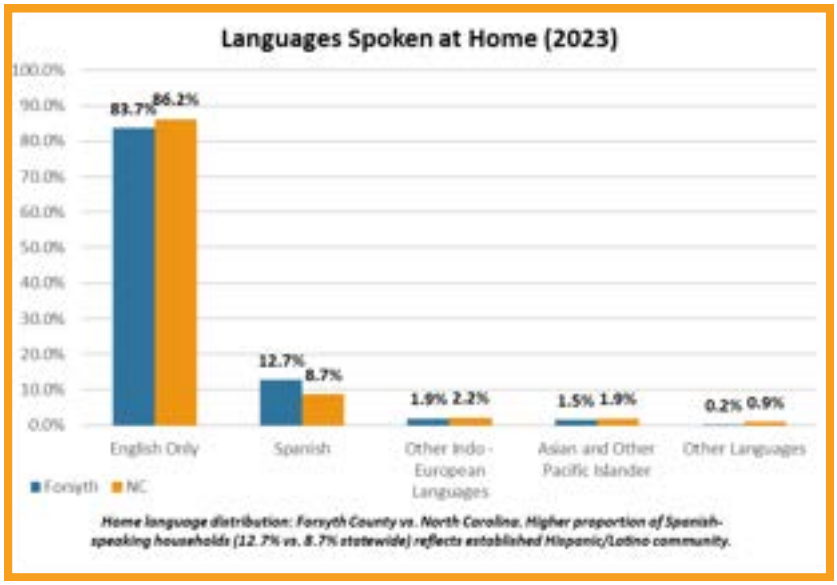
Forsyth County's young child population of approximately 22,094 children aged 0-4 represents a slight decline from 22,113 in 2020,[12] with projections indicating recovery to 23,615 by 2035. The youngest cohort—children birth to age two—numbered 13,241 in 2025 and is expected to grow to 14,234 by 2035.[12] This growth will be driven primarily by migration (92% of new residents) rather than natural increase, with high mobility rates as 30.5% of residents have moved since 2021.[12]

Demographic Composition and Stability

The demographic composition reveals established diversity with remarkable stability over time. Among children ages 0-4: 57.8% White, 27.3% African American, 14.9% other races, with 29.9% identifying as Hispanic/Latino.[11] These proportions have varied by less than two percentage points since 2020 and are projected to remain stable through 2035. This demographic stability provides strategic planning advantages unavailable to rapidly changing communities, enabling long-term investments in community-responsive programming, multilingual workforce development, and targeted outreach strategies



Racial composition of children aged 0-4 in Forsyth County, NC (2020-2035). The chart demonstrates remarkable demographic stability over the 15-year period, with all groups shifting by less than 2 percentage points from current levels.

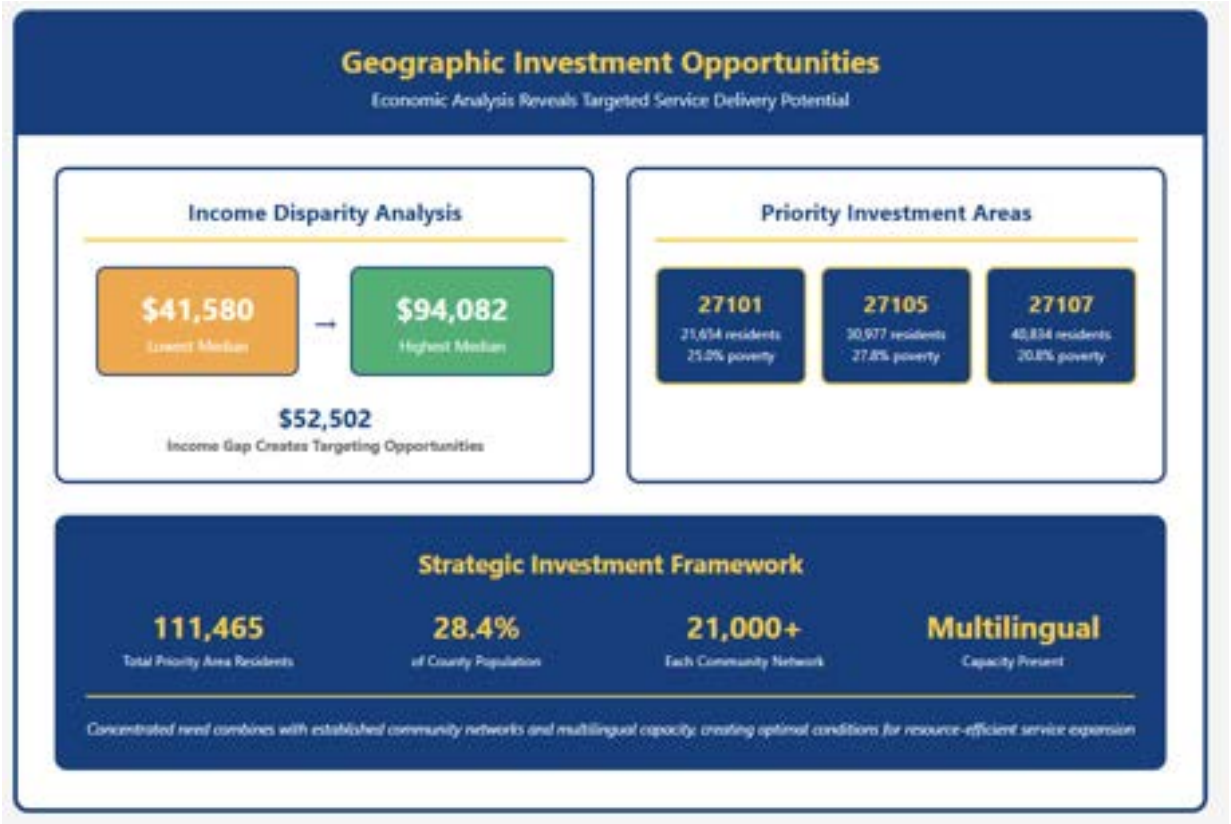


Home language distribution: Forsyth County vs. North Carolina. Higher proportion of Spanish-speaking households (12.7% vs. 8.7% statewide) reflects established Hispanic/Latino community.

Community Composition and Linguistic Diversity

Spanish represents the primary non-English language, spoken in 12.7% of households compared to 8.7% statewide. The foreign-born population comprises 9.5% of residents, with 63.7%[11] originating from Latin America. However, survey findings indicate that communication barriers and trust-building needs create persistent access challenges despite this established community presence.

[11] U.S. Census Bureau. (2025). American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. [12] North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management. (2025). North Carolina Population Projections.



Geographic Distribution

The county's population density of 963.4 people per square[13] mile masks seeming geographic disparities. Urban Winston-Salem concentrates the majority of residents and services, while rural communities face lower population density and limited service access. Survey data identifies rural families as a high-priority underserved population due to decreased access and increased cost surrounding transportation and service access challenges. These demographic patterns likely create geographic clusters that may require targeted, community-focused service delivery approaches in specific areas of the county.

Economic analysis across zip codes reveals significant investment opportunities with median household incomes ranging from $41,580 (27105) to $94,082 (27012)—a $52,502 disparity. Three zip codes demonstrate concentrated economic development potential: 27101 (25.0% poverty, 69.3% single-parent households[13]), 27105 (27.8% poverty, 64.1% single-parent households), and 27107 (20.8% poverty, 47.3% single-parent households). These areas contain established community networks with population densities exceeding 21,000 residents each.

III. Child and Family Needs

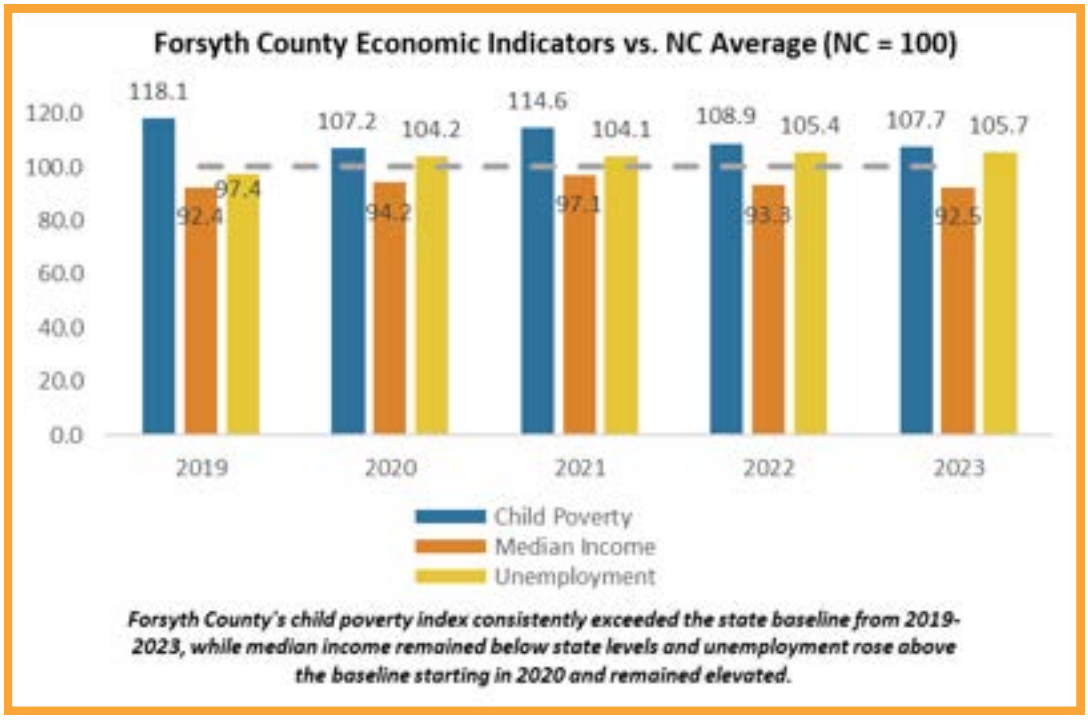
Family Structures

Family structure patterns influence economic stability significantly. The percentage of children under 18 living with one parent reached 41.2% between 2019-2023, exceeding the state average of 35.4%. Single-mother family households comprise 32.9%[14] of all households in Forsyth County versus 28.8% statewide, while single-father family households are comparable at 16.7% versus 17.3% statewide.[14] These single-parent households face particular economic challenges, as they typically depend on one income while managing all household and childcare responsibilities. Geographic analysis reveals substantial variation in family structure patterns across zip codes, with single-parent household rates ranging from 22.9% to 69.3%. Zip codes 27101, 27105, and 27107 show single-parent rates of 47.3% to 69.3%, indicating concentrated family support needs in these areas.

[13] U.S. Census Bureau. (2025). American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. [14] Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2025). Kids Count Data Center.

Economic Circumstances

Economic conditions show improvement alongside persistent disparities. Child poverty rates for those under 5 improved from 28.1% in 2019 to 24% in 2025, while improving it continues to exceed the state rate of 19.6%.[14] Median household income of $65,556 falls $5,282 below North Carolina's median. Even unemployment follows this pattern, with Forsyth County's 3.7% rate exceeding the state's 3.5% in 2023.[15] Economic hardship persists despite relatively high employment rates. Notably, 66% of children under six live in households where all parents are working, closely matching the state average of 67%.[16] However, this high rate of parental employment does not guarantee economic security, as employment structures compound financial stress for many families.



Forsyth County's child poverty index consistently exceeded the state baseline from 2019-2023, while median income remained below state levels and unemployment rose above the baseline starting in 2020 and remained elevated.

$845-$1,036
Monthly 4-Star Market Rates

$32,000+
Income Spread Creates Different Accessibility Needs

27%
Gross Income Spent on Childcare (Single Parent)

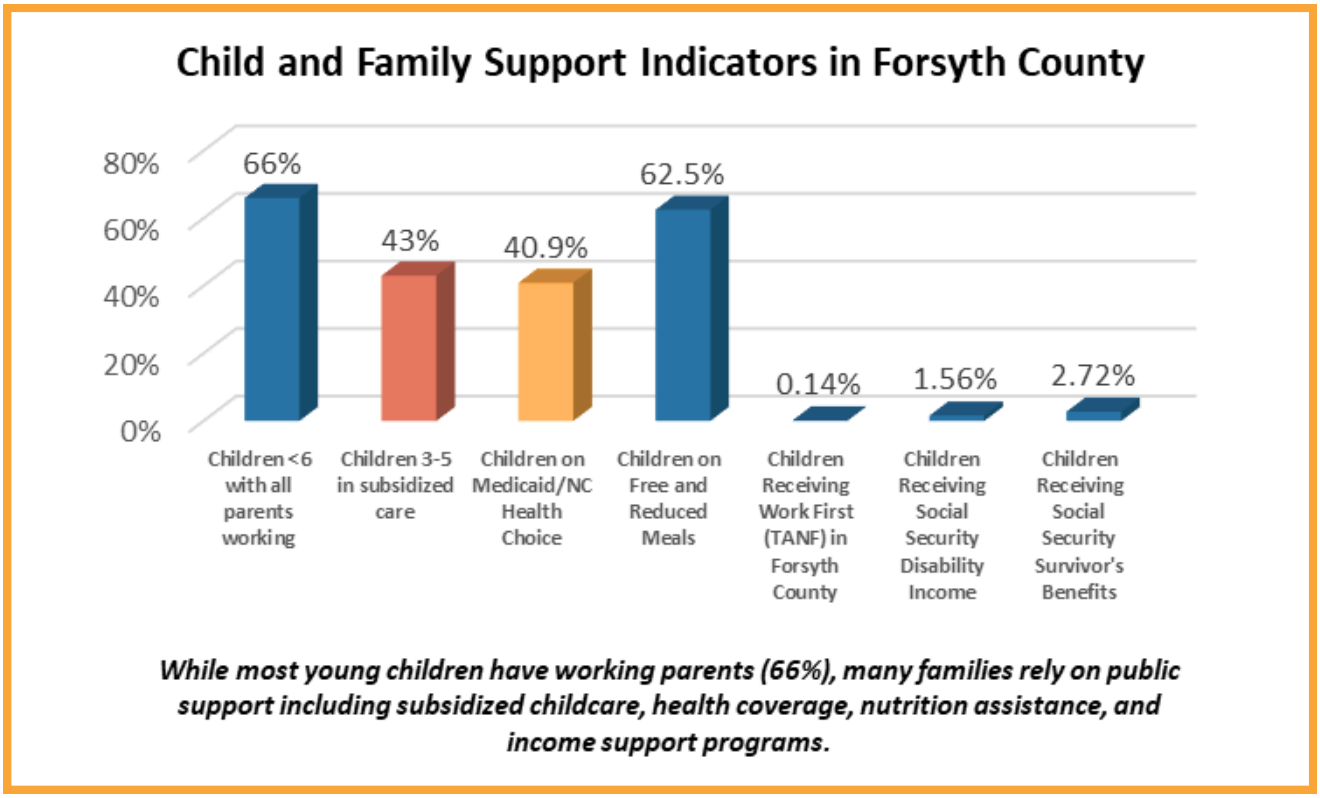
Economic Accessibility Analysis

Household income varies substantially across county families, with median incomes ranging from $44,534 to $76,526 across different communities. Income inequality data shows Forsyth County consistently exceeds state levels, with the gap between 80th and 20th percentile earners remaining at 4.6-4.9 compared to North Carolina's 4.7 over the assessment period.[16] While all income brackets experienced growth, the absolute dollar gap between highest and lowest earning households widened from $27,095 in 2019 to $31,992 in 2025.[16] This $32,000+ income spread creates different service accessibility needs across the county, requiring diversified programming approaches and sliding-scale support systems to ensure equitable access to quality early childhood services.

Cost Burden Challenges

Childcare costs consume 27% of gross income for a single-parent with one child;[16] moreover, 4-star market rates range between $845-$1,036.[16] Moreover, the childcare cost burden for a two child household has consistently been 2-4% higher than state rates since 2022. Housing cost burden affects 18.2% of families, while food insecurity impacts 20.9% of children compared to 18.9% statewide.

[14] Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2025). Kids Count Data Center. [15] U.S. Census Bureau. (2025). American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. [16] North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. (2025). State Health and Social Services Data.



While most young children have working parents (66%), many families rely on public support including subsidized childcare, health coverage, nutrition assistance, and income support programs.

Assistance and Support Needs

Public assistance participation reflects these economic pressures across multiple safety net programs. Health coverage through Medicaid and NC Health Choice reaches 40.9% of children under six (2023).[18] Beyond healthcare coverage, families rely on various support systems: 123 children receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF/Work First) benefits, while Social Security programs serve a much larger population with 1,370 children receiving Social Security Disability Income and 2,395 children receiving Social Security Survivor's Benefits—nearly 3,800 children total accessing Social Security support.[18]

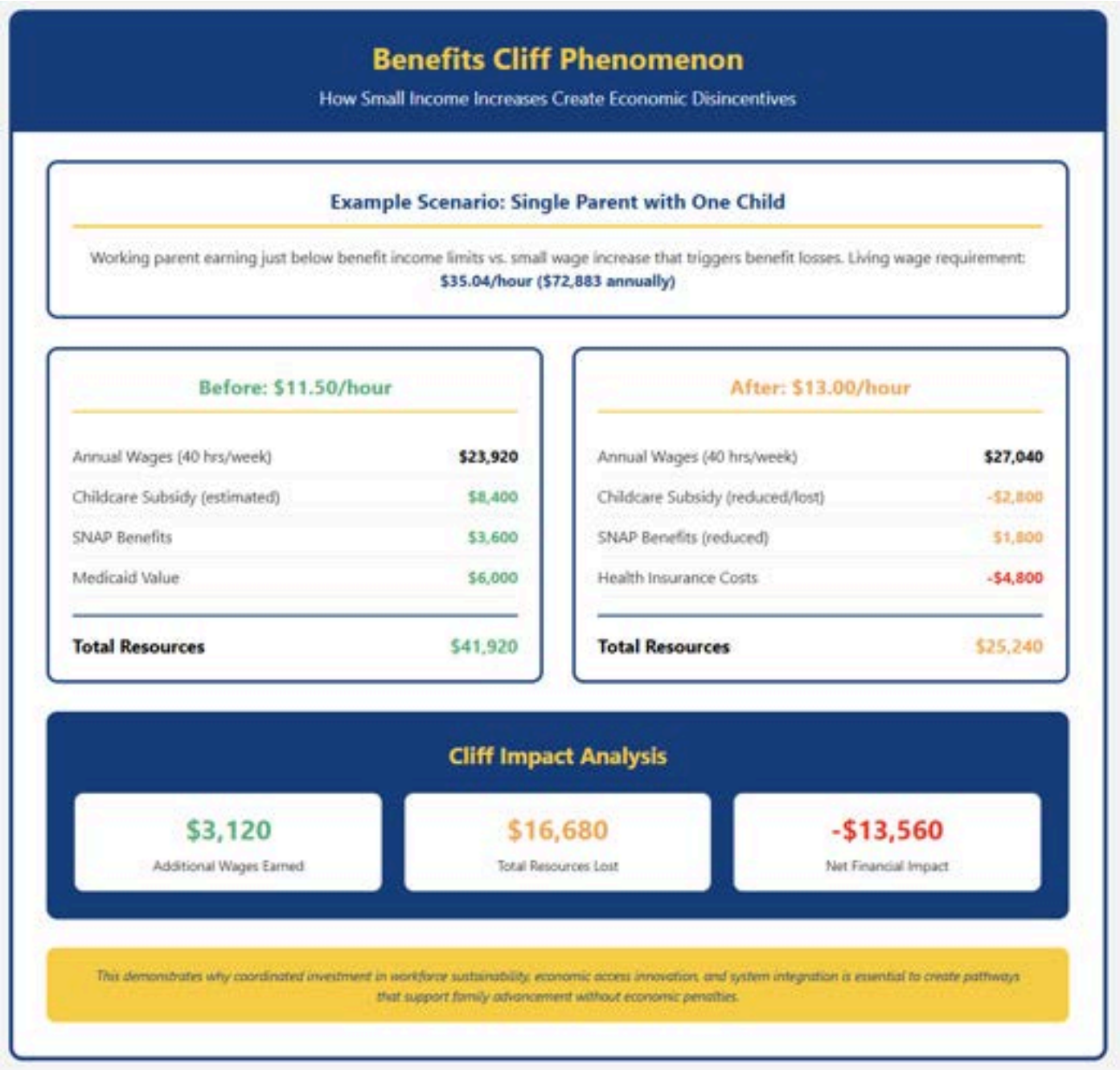
The community demonstrates strong capacity for supporting children with disabilities, with 12.9% of the population having disabilities compared to 14% statewide.[19] Early intervention infrastructure serves 6.1% of infants and toddlers versus 5.8% statewide, with 100% compliance in transition planning requirements.[20] Survey respondents identified children with disabilities as a high-priority underserved population, reporting coordination challenges between early intervention, inclusive childcare options, and preschool special education services. These findings indicate opportunities for enhanced navigation support that builds upon existing professional relationships and coordination strengths.

Childcare subsidies represent another critical support system, with 43% of children receiving subsidized care in 2025 being between the ages of 3-5, up from 37% in 2020.[17]

However, when examining all children in Forsyth county, only 7% receive subsidized childcare support. This creates a significant gap, particularly given that 66% of children under 6 live in households with working parents, yet with 24% of children under 5 living in poverty,[19] many income-eligible working families cannot access needed subsidized care.

[17] Early Years NC. (2025). Early Childhood Program Enrollment and Outcome Data.[18] North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. (2025). State Health and Social Services Data. [19] Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2025). Kids Count Data Center. [20] Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative. (2025). National Survey of Children's Health Data.

Survey triangulation reveals that the "benefits cliff" phenomenon—where small income increases trigger disproportionate benefit losses—creates additional barriers to economic advancement. This traps families between inadequate wages and service eligibility, creating disincentives to employment advancement and perpetuating cycles of economic instability.



Health Outcomes

Health indicators present mixed patterns despite exceptional healthcare infrastructure. Forsyth County maintains physician ratios of 56.9 per 10,000 population[23] compared to 25.3 statewide and mental health provider ratios improving to 1:260 (better than state averages),[21] yet both physical and mental health outcomes show concerning trends. Geographic analysis reveals significant health access variations, with uninsured rates ranging from 5.0% to 17.1% across zip codes. Zip codes 27101, 27105, and 27107 show uninsured rates of 13.6%-17.1%,[22] indicating concentrated health access challenges that compound other economic factors in these areas.

[21] University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute. (2025). County Health Rankings and Roadmaps. [22] North Carolina State Center for Health Statistics. (2025). Vital Statistics and Health Outcome Data. [23] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2025). National Health Indicators.

Maternal and Child Health

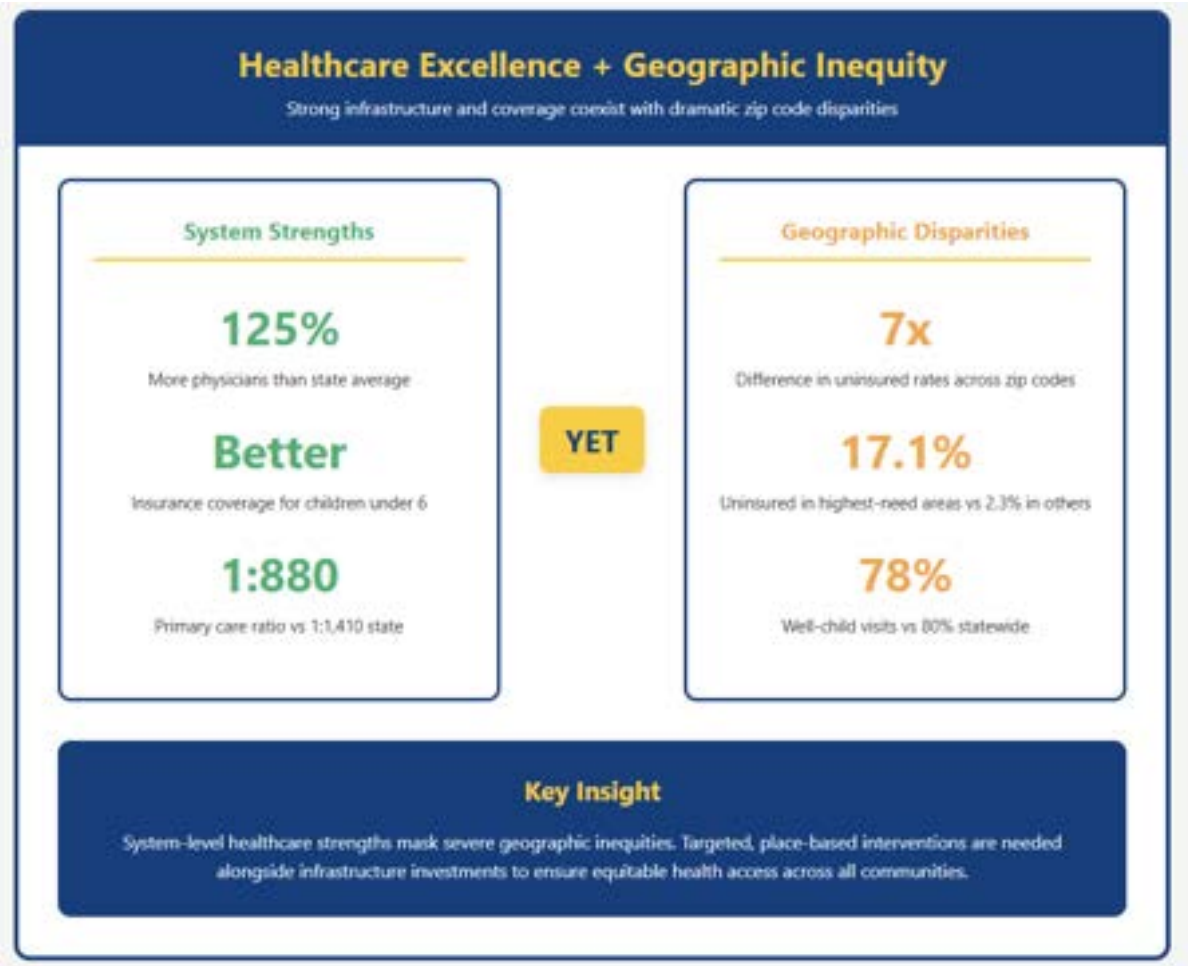
Breastfeeding initiation rates declined from 86% in 2019 to 70% in 2023 while state rates remained stable at 81%.[24] Late or no prenatal care doubled from 6% to 12% while state rates remained around 9%.[24] Infant health vulnerabilities begin early, with 9.9% low birth weight (416 babies annually) and infant mortality fluctuating between 6.8-9.8 per 1,000 births.[24] Preventive care utilization declined—well-child visit completion dropped from 83% to 78%, falling below the state rate of 82%.[26]

Mental Health Challenges

Mental health outcomes deteriorated significantly. Poor mental health days increased steadily from 4.4 in 2021-2023 to 5.0 days per month in 2025, now matching the worsened state rate.[25] Frequent mental distress rose from 14% to 16% between 2023 and 2024, maintaining that elevated level through 2025. Feelings of loneliness affect 30% of residents in 2025.[25] While suicide rates remained stable at 12 per 100,000 (below state averages), anxiety-related emergency visits climbed from 2.9% to 3.7%, and emergency department visits for trauma and stressors increased 50% while state rates improved.[26] Survey findings of widespread parental stress and burnout validate these statistical trends, confirming that community-level stressors are overwhelming individual coping capacity.

Adult Physical Health

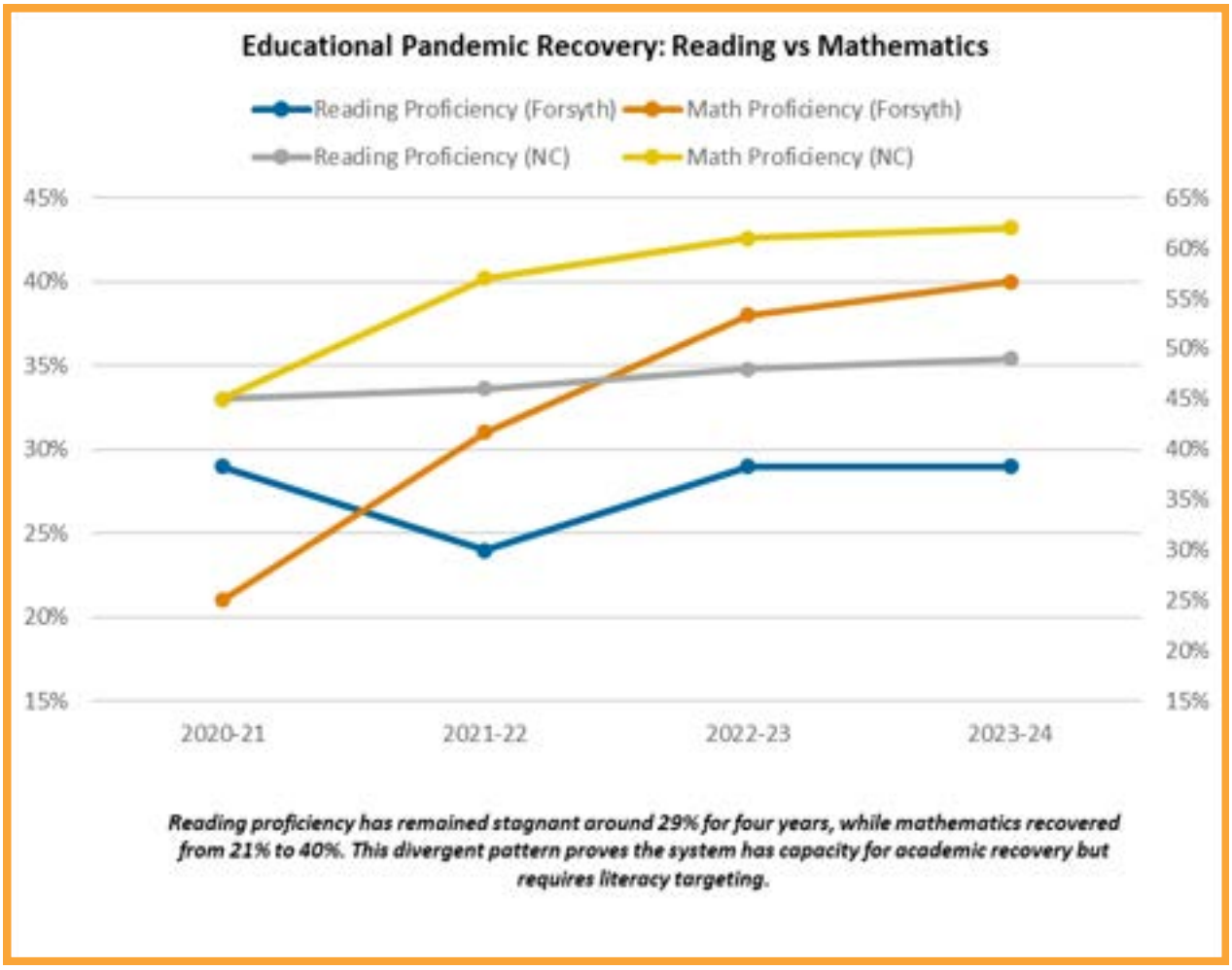
Adult Physical Health indicators show mixed patterns. Physical distress measures improved significantly in 2023, with poor physical health days declining to 2.9 per month and frequent physical distress dropping to 10%, both matching state averages.[26] However, by 2025 both had deteriorated (3.9 days and 12% respectively). Similarly, adults reporting poor or fair health improved from 20% in 2022 to 13% in 2023, but increased to 17% by 2025.[26] In contrast, some indicators remained more stable: HIV prevalence consistently exceeded state rates (522 per 100,000 versus 385 statewide in 2025), while obesity and diabetes showed less variation.[24]



[24] North Carolina State Center for Health Statistics. (2025). Vital Statistics and Health Outcome Data. [25] University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute. (2025). County Health Rankings and Roadmaps. [26] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2025). National Health Indicators.

Educational Readiness

Strong early intervention infrastructure demonstrates system capacity for supporting child development. Forsyth County serves 6.1% of infants and toddlers through early intervention services compared to 5.8% statewide, with the Forsyth CDSA Region maintaining 100% compliance with transition planning requirements[28]. This foundation creates strategic advantages for addressing educational achievement challenges through coordinated early support.



Academic Recovery Patterns

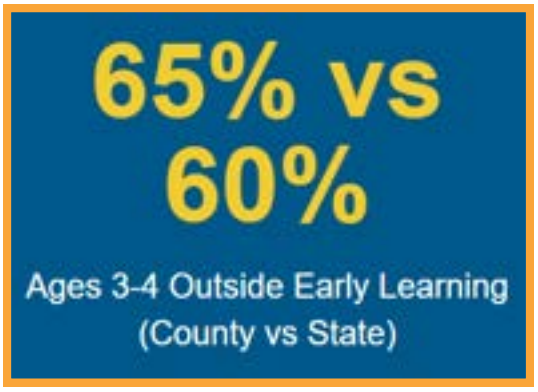
Educational achievement data reveals varied recovery from pandemic disruption despite demonstrated intervention capacity. Third-grade reading proficiency dropped to 29% in 2020-21, declined further to 24% in 2021-22, then partially recovered to 29% where it has remained stable for two consecutive years through 2023-24, maintaining a 20-point difference with state performance (29% vs 49%)[27]. Mathematics demonstrates recovery potential, improving steadily from pandemic lows of 21% to 40%, yet maintaining a 22-point difference with state averages (40% vs 62%)[27]. This pattern indicates specific literacy instruction opportunities requiring targeted enhancement beyond general recovery efforts.

Service Utilization Patterns

Educational outcomes vary across service utilization indicators. Language support needs affect 3% of children countywide[28], while 102 children received childcare referrals in languages other than English despite 29.9% of children being Hispanic[29], indicating opportunities for enhanced multilingual service connections.

102
Non-English Referrals
vs
29.9% Hispanic
Children

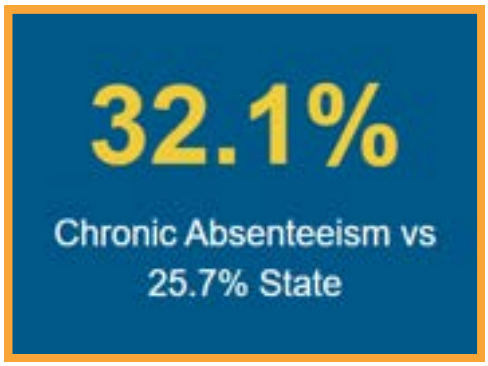
[27] North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. (2025). School Performance and Demographic Data. [28] North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. (2025). State Health and Social Services Data.[29] Early Years NC. (2025). Early Childhood Program Enrollment and Outcome Data.



Additionally, 65% of 3-4 year-olds remain outside formal early learning programs compared to 60% statewide, creating pre-kindergarten preparation opportunities[32]. Kindergarten retention affects 2-3% of students annually (approximately 100 children), suggesting early access patterns influence school readiness outcomes. Geographic analysis reveals zip codes 27105 and 27107 contain higher concentrations of school-age children (15.5%-16.2% ages 5-14) with moderate preschool enrollment rates of 5.9%-6.4%, while zip code 27101 shows notably lower K-12 enrollment (52.1%)[30] compared to county patterns, indicating varied educational engagement patterns across high-need areas.

EDUCATIONAL PATTERNS THROUGH GRADE 3

Educational challenges continue beyond early childhood, with chronic absenteeism affecting 32.1% of students in 2024, exceeding both state (25.7%) and peer urban county (25.5%) rates.[31] Student discipline patterns show significant variation across demographic groups, with suspension rates ranging from 31 to 346 per 1,000 students compared to the overall rate of 172 per 1,000.[30] Similarly, multilingual service utilization shows substantial gaps, with only 102 non-English referrals annually despite nearly 30% of young children speaking Spanish in their households. Despite strong early intervention infrastructure and quality programming capacity, these outcome variations indicate that service accessibility patterns, rather than program quality, influence educational continuity across different community populations.



System Navigation Complexity

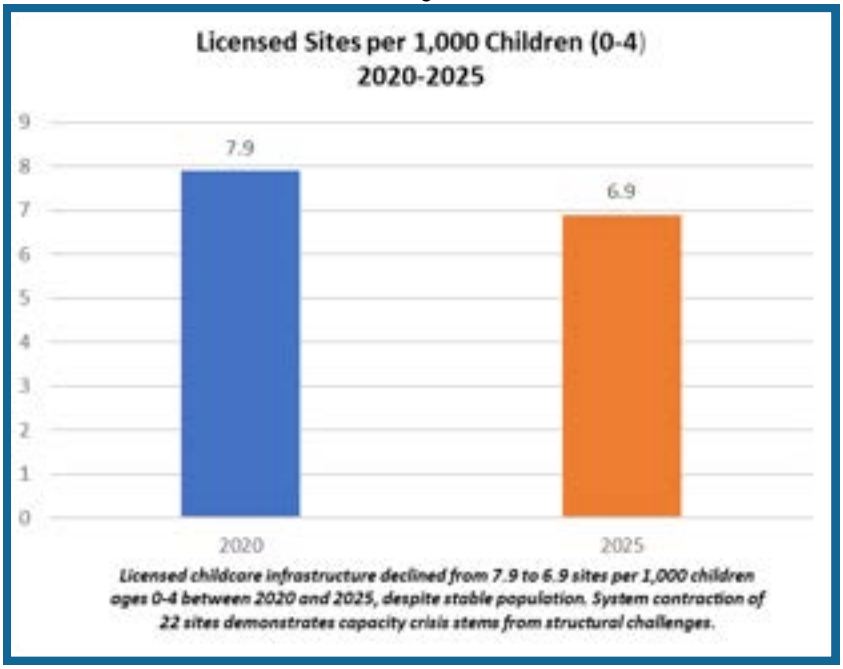
Families encounter structural challenges beyond program availability. Survey respondents indicate fragmented navigation experiences despite strong provider coordination infrastructure. Navigation complexity creates additional challenges for families seeking educational support, particularly affecting those who would most benefit from early intervention services.

Effective Programming Model

Targeted, direct-delivery approaches demonstrate significant impact potential. Dolly Parton's Imagination Library participant survey respondents indicated increased daily shared reading from 46.6% to 67.5%, representing a 45% relative increase in family literacy engagement. This programming model demonstrates how well-designed, accessible services can improve outcomes when navigation challenges are systematically addressed.

[30] North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. (2025). School Performance and Demographic Data. [31] My Future NC. (2025). Chronic Absenteeism Dashboard. [32] Early Years NC. (2025). Early Childhood Program Enrollment and Outcome Data.

IV. Early Care and Education Resources



Quality Infrastructure and Capacity Constraints

In Forsyth County, there are 152 licensed early childhood facilities serving 21.4% of children under six (5,723 children).[33] Among enrolled children, the system maintains exceptional quality with averages of 74% of children in family childcare homes and 76% of children in centers attending 4-5 star programs in 2025.[33] Community demand significantly exceeds current capacity, with 78.6% of families actively seeking access to quality programming.

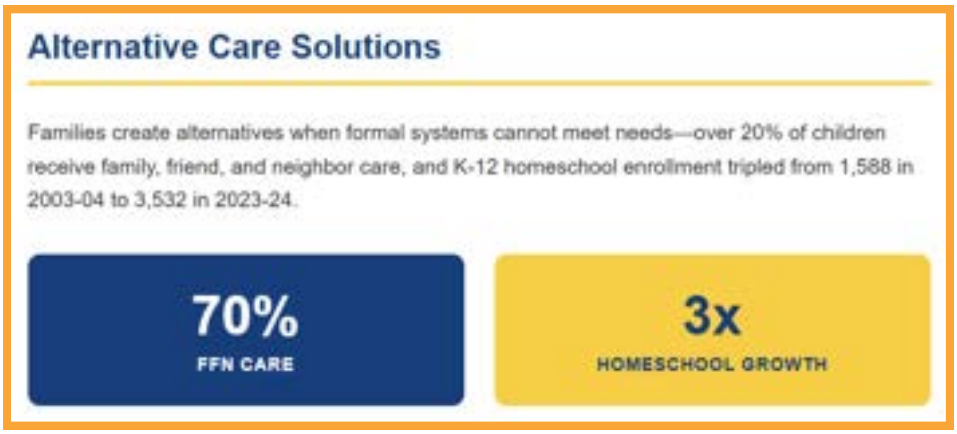
This high demand demonstrates strong community commitment to quality care while revealing that current capacity meets only 27% of community need, indicating substantial unmet demand. However, current underutilization patterns indicate that expansion must address enrollment barriers alongside capacity building, as available slots sometimes remain unfilled due to access challenges.

Capacity Development Challenges

Infant-Toddler Capacity Constraints

The expansion need is most pronounced for youngest children, with current enrollment serving only 2,223 infants and toddlers while 75.2% of working families with infants and toddlers actively seek quality care options. Current enrollment meets only 22% of families seeking care, indicating substantial unmet need for infant-toddler services.

This gap reflects both insufficient licensed capacity and enrollment barriers that may prevent full utilization of existing slots. Family childcare infant/toddler enrollment declined 18% during the pandemic, from 163 to 134 children, further constraining options for this critical age group.



Overall Access Gap

With 78.6% of families actively seeking access to quality early childhood programming, community demand significantly exceeds current capacity. Current systems meet only 27% of families seeking access[34], indicating substantial unmet community need. Families create alternatives when formal systems cannot meet needs---over 70% of children receive family, friend, and neighbor care, and K-12 homeschool enrollment tripled from 1,598 in 2003-04 to 5,532 in 2023-24.

[33] Early Years NC. (2025). Early Childhood Program Enrollment and Outcome Data. [34] Smart Start of Forsyth County. (2025). Community Needs Assessment Survey. [35] U.S. Census Bureau. (2025). American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. [36] North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. (2025). School Performance and Demographic Data.

Economic Model Enhancement Opportunities

Workforce Investment Need

Current educator compensation of $11.00 per hour for infant-toddler care and $12.45 for preschool falls below living wage requirements.[39] Even the highest educator wages ($12.45) remain below the lowest living wage scenarios, which range from $14.56 for dual-income households with no children to $19.94 for households with children.[40]

This compensation gap creates workforce mobility to sectors offering better economic opportunities, while professional development participation remains strong across 1,543 educators county-wide, indicating field commitment despite economic constraints. Survey respondents identified workforce compensation, childcare affordability, and service availability as top enhancement priorities, validating current analysis and investment focus areas This compensation gap creates workforce mobility to sectors offering better economic opportunities, while professional development participation remains strong across 1,543 educators county-wide, indicating field commitment despite economic constraints. Survey respondents identified workforce compensation, childcare affordability, and service availability as top enhancement priorities, validating current analysis and investment focus areas

Subsidy System Enhancement

Current childcare subsidies serve 42% of children ages 3-5, up from 37% in 2020,[38] demonstrating system responsiveness. However, significant opportunities remain for expanding subsidy access to reach additional income-eligible families, particularly those with infants and toddlers where capacity constraints are most severe.

Service Coordination and Specialized Programming

Program Infrastructure

NC Pre-K operates 30 classrooms serving 797 children as of June 2025, representing recovery from pandemic impacts while highlighting continued expansion opportunities. Professional development infrastructure remains robust with 64 birth-to-five classrooms receiving technical assistance and Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H.) scholarship participation stable at 62 participants across 28 programs.

Family Navigation Support

The childcare referral system served 633 families, with 102 receiving services in languages other than English. Substantial potential exists for expanding navigation support to reach additional families seeking system access, particularly given existing multilingual capacity that could enhance language-appropriate service delivery.

Geographic Priority Areas

Geographic service analysis identifies zip codes 27101, 27105, and 27107 with median incomes of $44,611 to $59,897, preschool enrollment rates of 5.9%-6.4%, and uninsured rates of 13.6%-17.1%.[41] These zip codes contain 111,465 residents total with established community networks and bilingual capacity that create opportunities for peer navigation and community-responsive programming development.

[37] North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. (2025). State Health and Social Services Data. [38] Early Years NC. (2025). Early Childhood Program Enrollment and Outcome Data. [39] Child Care Services Association. (2024, January). Infant Toddler Care Statewide Factsheet. [40] Massachusetts Institute of Technology. (2025). Living Wage Calculator. [41] U.S. Census Bureau. (2025). American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

V. Community Strengths and Assets

Established Infrastructure

Forsyth County benefits from 30 years of Smart Start organizational stability and extensive collaborative networks. SSFC operates with approximately 30 professional staff coordinating services across 152 licensed childcare sites and extensive partner networks. Established collaborative initiatives include Pre-K Priority, Forsyth County for Grade-Level Reading, Thriving Together Forsyth, and Action4Equity—all demonstrating sustained commitment to cross-sector collaboration. This exceptional coordination infrastructure creates a strong foundation for addressing structural capacity and economic sustainability opportunities through strategic enhancement and coordinated investment.

Service Provider Network

Building on this coordination infrastructure, the community maintains comprehensive service capacity across multiple domains that complement SSFC's backbone functions.

Early Childhood Focus

Child Care Resource Center, Imprints Cares, The Parenting PATH, Centers for Exceptional Children, and Early Years provide specialized expertise in childcare support, family education, abuse prevention, special needs services, and workforce development. These partnerships allow SSFC to leverage specialized expertise while maintaining service coordination excellence.

Health and Social Services

The robust network including Forsyth County Health and Human Services, multiple healthcare systems, mental health providers, and crisis intervention services creates comprehensive support systems that extend beyond early childhood programming. Trauma-informed care capacity spans multiple organizations including Crossnore Communities, Eliza's Helping Hands, and specialized crisis response through Bridges to Hope Family Justice Center, providing coordinated support for families that creates optimal conditions for child development and family thriving.

Basic Needs Support

The extensive network including Crisis Control Ministry, Samaritan Ministries, Catholic Charities, and numerous faith-based organizations providing food, housing, and emergency assistance creates a comprehensive safety net that supports family stability—the essential foundation for children's healthy development and school readiness.

Data and Research Capacity

These service partnerships are strengthened by strong data infrastructure through Forsyth Futures that provides comprehensive community-level analysis, while community-engaged research through the Peoples' Research Council and Sankofa Labs ensures that both quantitative data and diverse community perspectives inform system improvements. This combination creates infrastructure for resident-led solutions development that enhances the effectiveness of service coordination efforts.

Community and Economic Assets

The community's demographic stability provides strategic advantages for long-term service planning and targeted programming development. The established Hispanic/Latino community (29.9% of young children) represents community stability with significant potential for peer navigation and innovative programming development. Current service utilization patterns indicate substantial opportunities for expanding language-appropriate services that activate existing community assets. Multiple higher education institutions provide workforce development pathways, while the diverse economic base offers employment opportunities that support family economic stability and community prosperity.

Coordination Mechanisms

These assets are unified through effective resource coordination mechanisms including shared facilities, bilingual staffing across organizations, and regular convening forums. The Bridges to Hope Family Justice Center exemplifies co-location approaches that maximize service efficiency and family accessibility, while collaborative initiatives like Thriving Together's "Convening the Conveners" demonstrate alignment capacity across multiple stakeholder groups to optimize resource utilization and maximize collective impact. These coordination strengths position the community to enhance structural capacity through strategic collaboration and coordinated resource deployment while addressing enrollment barriers that prevent full utilization of existing service excellence.

VI. Analysis and Key Findings

Quality Achievement Foundation for Expansion

Forsyth County has built exceptional early childhood programming infrastructure with averages of 74% of children in family childcare homes and 76% of children in centers attending 4-5 star facilities. This proven quality delivery demonstrates strong operational expertise that provides a solid foundation for strategic expansion. Currently serving 21.4% of children under six (5,723 children), the community faces substantial unmet demand, with 78.6% of families actively seeking access indicating significant expansion opportunities when enrollment barriers are addressed. Current capacity meets only 27% of expressed community need, indicating that high-quality programming excellence positions the community well for strategic expansion that addresses both capacity and accessibility challenges. Geographic analysis reveals this demand concentration varies significantly across zip codes, with three areas demonstrating both high need indicators and substantial community assets for strategic expansion.

Economic Model Innovation Opportunities

The assessment reveals significant potential for economic model innovation that builds on existing strengths. Current market rates ($845-1,036 monthly) demonstrate family willingness to invest in quality care, while the dedicated workforce of 992 professionals currently serving families shows strong field commitment, supported by broader professional development infrastructure reaching 1,543 educators county-wide. These foundations create strategic opportunities for diversified funding approaches that can simultaneously enhance family accessibility and professional compensation adequacy.

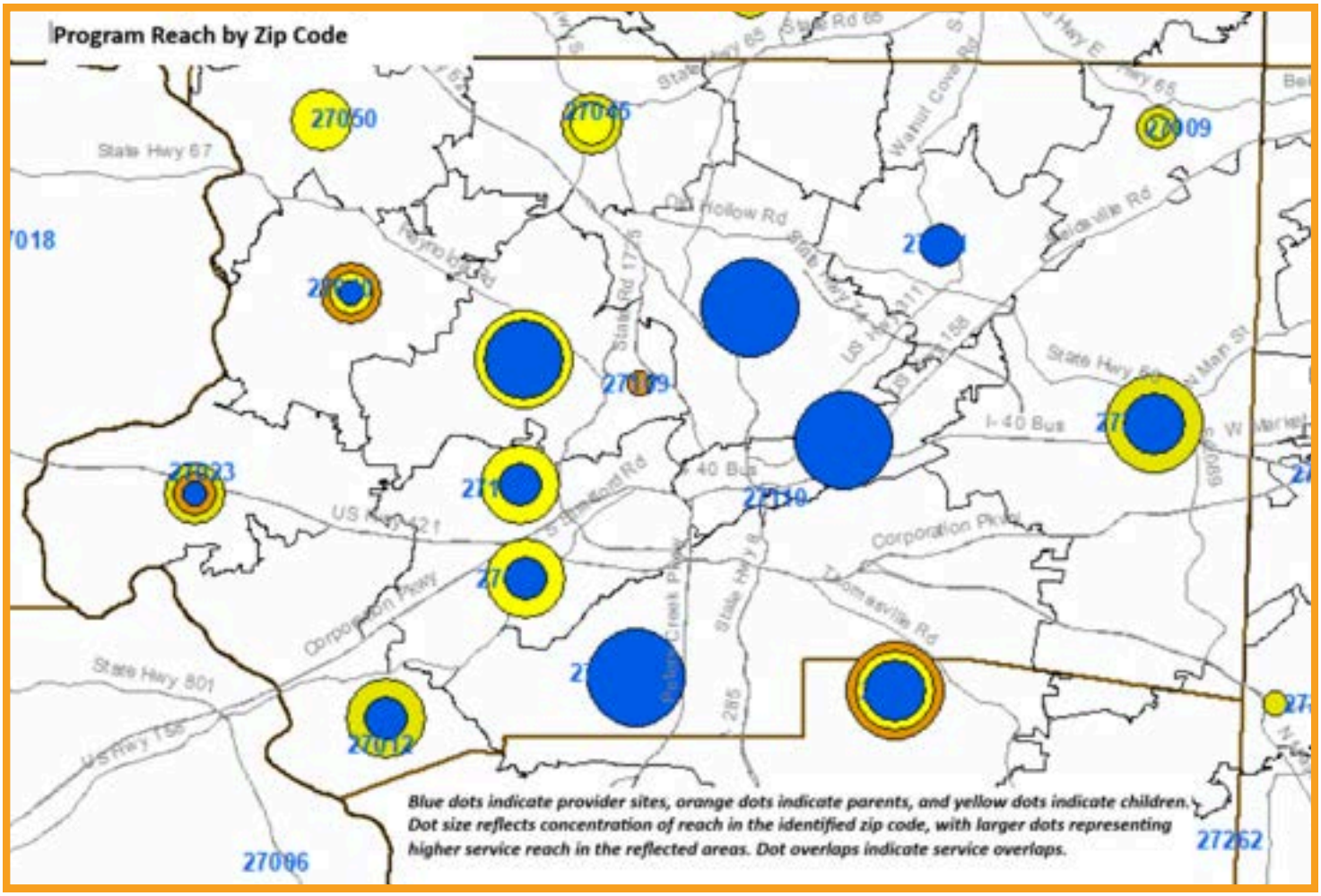
The existing professional development infrastructure serving 1,543 educators provides an excellent foundation for workforce enhancement initiatives. Current educator compensation ($11-12.45 hourly versus $15.49-35.04 living wage requirements) presents clear opportunities for targeted intervention that can build on demonstrated field commitment and reduce workforce mobility toward other sectors while addressing the economic sustainability needs that affect both providers and families. Zip code analysis reveals income disparities ranging from $41,580 to $94,082 create varied economic accessibility needs, with zip codes 27101, 27105, and 27107 demonstrating concentrated opportunities where targeted financing innovations could simultaneously address family affordability and workforce sustainability challenges.

Community Support System Strengths and Enhancement Potential

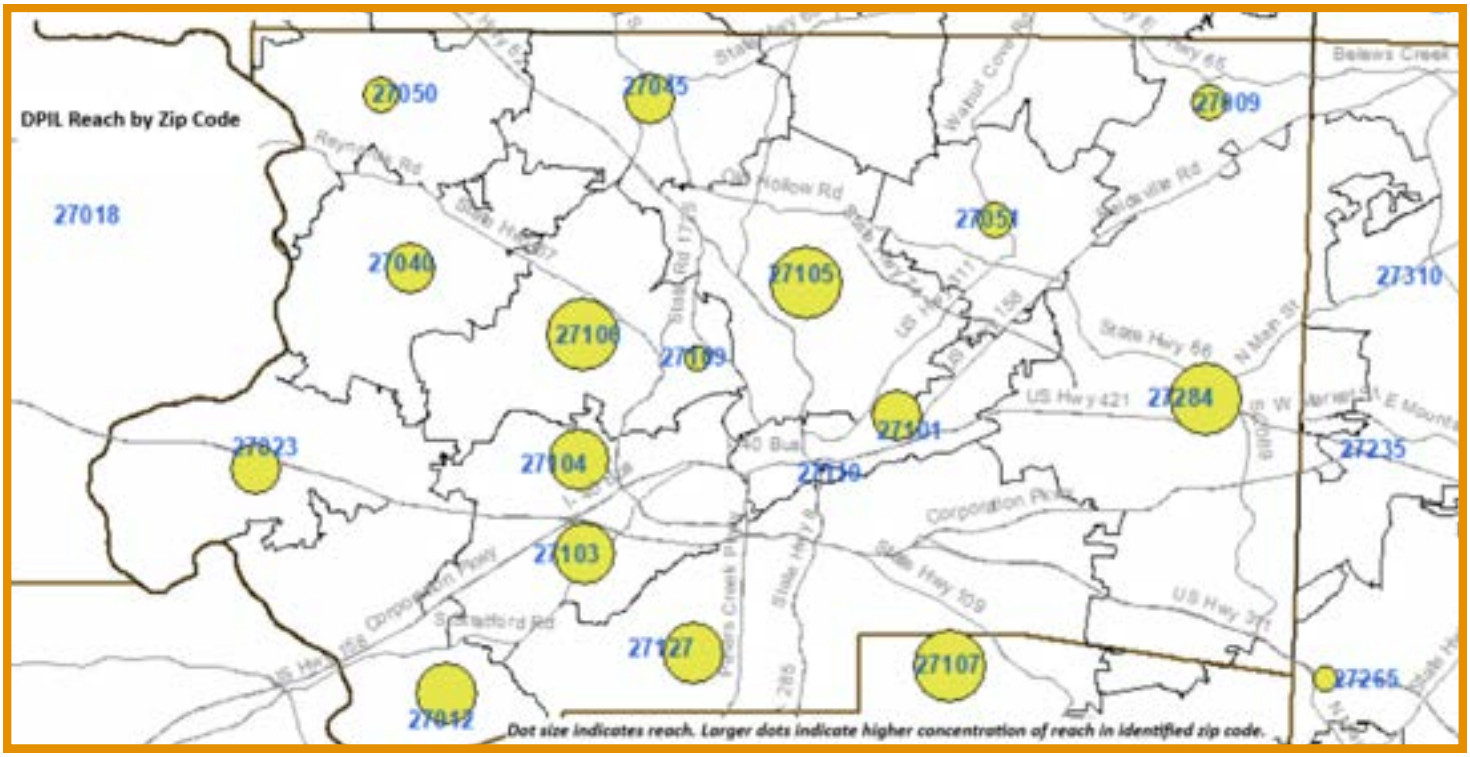
Forsyth County's distinctive characteristics position it well for targeted, locally-responsive interventions. The community's healthcare provider abundance exceeding state averages creates a strong foundation for integrated approaches to address locally-identified needs. Analysis shows zip codes 27101, 27105, and 27107 have uninsured rates of 13.6%-17.1%, indicating where enhanced health navigation and community support integration could have greatest impact while building on existing healthcare infrastructure strengths. However, health outcomes showing increased mental health challenges (5.0 poor mental health days monthly, 30% reporting loneliness) indicate that community-level stressors require coordinated responses that leverage established professional relationships while addressing underlying access barriers.

Community Asset Activation Potential

The remarkable demographic stability (29.9% Hispanic children, with established patterns projected through 2035) represents exceptional strategic planning advantages that position Forsyth County ahead of communities experiencing rapid demographic shifts. This stability creates optimal conditions for long-term targeted programming investments and multilingual workforce development with predictable, sustainable returns. Current service utilization patterns reveal significant opportunities for multilingual service enhancement. With only 102 non-English childcare referrals occurring annually despite nearly 30% of children speaking Spanish in their households, substantial potential exists for expanding language-appropriate services that activate existing community assets and established networks. Zip codes 27101, 27105, and 27107 contain significant established community populations with the demographic stability and network infrastructure that position these areas for targeted programming expansion and peer navigation development. This pattern indicates system capacity for targeted programming enhancement rather than fundamental infrastructure limitations.



Geographic analysis demonstrates service distribution patterns that highlight expansion opportunities across the county. Service delivery patterns show concentration in central areas with opportunities for enhanced reach in rural communities, building on existing coordination infrastructure. These patterns reveal how strong coordination infrastructure can be enhanced through targeted service expansion approaches that address geographic access barriers. Specifically, zip codes 27101, 27105, and 27107 demonstrate how areas with concentrated economic challenges also contain the population density and community infrastructure necessary for efficient targeted service expansion approaches.



Even broadly-designed programs like Dolly Parton's Imagination Library demonstrate similar distribution patterns, showing how successful programs can inform strategies for achieving consistent access across all geographic areas.

These patterns reveal how strong coordination infrastructure can be enhanced through targeted service expansion approaches.

Educational Foundation and Continuity Enhancement Potential

Strong early intervention performance (serving 6.1% of infants and toddlers versus 5.8% statewide, with 100% transition compliance) provides an exceptional foundation for building sustained educational achievement. However, current third-grade reading outcomes at 29% proficiency compared to 49% statewide present significant enhancement opportunities. Mathematics recovery from pandemic lows of 21% to 40% demonstrates the system's capacity for targeted improvement, while the divergent reading pattern indicates specific literacy instruction opportunities.

Educational challenges extend beyond early childhood, with chronic absenteeism affecting 32.1% of students versus 25.7% statewide. Despite strong early intervention infrastructure and quality programming capacity, these patterns indicate that service accessibility, rather than program quality, influences educational continuity across the birth-through-grade-3 spectrum. This pattern is evident in zip codes 27101, 27105, and 27107, where varied educational engagement patterns (K-12 enrollment ranging from 52.1% to 77.4%) combined with economic challenges demonstrate how service accessibility barriers affect educational continuity differently across geographic areas.

Coordination Infrastructure as Foundation for Integration

Exceptional coordination capacity through Smart Start's backbone role and extensive collaborative networks creates strong foundations that position the community for enhanced service integration. Current coordination excellence among providers provides a solid base for developing streamlined family navigation experiences that build upon existing professional relationships and organizational expertise.

Survey insights confirm opportunities for structural integration that can reduce family navigation complexity while maintaining the organizational expertise and specialization that makes current coordination successful. The established coordination infrastructure provides the foundation for addressing enrollment barriers through unified entry systems and coordinated resource deployment that maximize community coordination assets while enhancing family accessibility. This coordination infrastructure is particularly valuable in zip codes 27101, 27105, and 27107, where concentrated need indicators combined with established community networks create optimal conditions for integrated service delivery approaches that maximize both organizational expertise and family accessibility.

VII. Strategic Recommendations

Building upon demonstrated community strengths—30 years of organizational stability, proven quality delivery, established collaborative networks, and demographic predictability—five interconnected investment priorities emerge that maximize existing assets while addressing critical enhancement needs.

1 Priority 1: Workforce Sustainability and Career Advancement

Investment Opportunity:

Build comprehensive workforce sustainability systems that enhance the established professional development infrastructure currently serving 1,543 educators across career pathway programs, scholarship systems, and higher education partnerships.

Leverage Existing Strengths:
Expand upon current T.E.A.C.H. scholarship participation (62 participants across 28 programs), technical assistance reaching 64 birth-to-five classrooms, and established higher education partnerships.

Development Focus Areas:

- Enhanced career pipeline capacity with specialized pathways for infant/toddler care, bilingual competence, and rural service provision
- Comprehensive compensation enhancement systems utilizing existing professional development networks
- Family childcare sector strengthening through business development and quality enhancement initiatives
- Higher education partnership integration for sustainable career advancement

Critical Need:
Current educator compensation ($11-12.45 hourly) requires immediate enhancement to prevent continued workforce mobility while capitalizing on demonstrated professional excellence.

2 **Priority 2: Economic Access Model Innovation**

Investment Opportunity:
Develop sustainable financing frameworks that simultaneously enhance family accessibility and provider economic viability, utilizing current public-private partnership foundations and demonstrated community investment capacity.

Leverage Existing Strengths:
Established funding coordination mechanisms, employer networks, and community collaborative infrastructure that demonstrates sustained early childhood investment.

Development Focus Areas:

- Diversified funding approaches combining multiple sources and stakeholder contributions
- Comprehensive transition support systems preventing economic destabilization for advancing families
- Employer engagement networks capitalizing on high working parent populations (66% of children under six)
- Sustainable financing models addressing both accessibility and compensation sustainability

Critical Need:
Current economic dynamics where families invest 27% of gross income in childcare while 24% of children under 5 experience poverty require immediate intervention to address capacity constraints. With current systems meeting only 27% of families seeking access, sustainable financing must address both family affordability and system expansion needs.

3 **Priority 3: Community Engagement and Geographic Access Enhancement**

Investment Opportunity:
Activate established community assets and demographic stability through enhanced service delivery models and multilingual capacity development, utilizing existing bilingual capacity and community infrastructure.

Leverage Existing Strengths:
Demographic stability through 2035, existing bilingual service capacity, established community organizations, and community infrastructure demonstrating long-term community presence.

Development Focus Areas:

- Expanded service delivery mechanisms for transportation-challenged and geographically isolated families
- Enhanced multilingual capacity and bilingual service systems across service delivery
- Community engagement through trust-building initiatives that activate existing community leadership
- Geographic community asset utilization for distributed service provision with particular focus on zip codes 27101, 27105, and 27107 where concentrated economic challenges combine with established community networks and population density to create optimal conditions for peer navigation and community-responsive programming development

Critical Need:

Only 102 non-English childcare referrals annually despite 29.9% Hispanic children indicates immediate opportunities for community asset activation and enhanced community engagement

4

Priority 4: System Integration and Navigation Enhancement

Investment Opportunity:

Create integrated service delivery systems that reduce family navigation complexity while maintaining organizational expertise and specialized program excellence, utilizing exceptional coordination infrastructure. Current data showing persistent challenges from early childhood through elementary grades (32.1% chronic absenteeism) demonstrates the urgency for coordinated birth-through-grade-3 approaches.

Leverage Existing Strengths:

Smart Start's backbone organization capacity, established collaborative networks, and current coordination mechanisms demonstrating sustained alignment capability.

Development Focus Areas:

- Coordinated entry and assessment systems reducing family navigation complexity while preserving program specialization
- Cross-provider coordination systems addressing multiple family needs through integrated case management
- Information sharing protocols enabling comprehensive family support while maintaining organizational autonomy
- Prevention-focused investment strategies addressing root causes through coordinated early intervention

Critical Need:

Families report fragmented navigation experiences despite strong professional coordination, indicating immediate opportunities for structural integration utilizing existing collaborative strengths.

5

Priority 5: Community Resilience and Multi-Generational Support

Investment Opportunity:

Address community-specific stress and health indicators through locally-led solutions and sustainable community capacity building, maximizing established community organizations, networks, and civic infrastructure.

Leverage Existing Strengths:

Community organizations, community networks, civic infrastructure, and resident engagement capacity demonstrated through existing collaborative initiatives and community-engaged research systems.

Development Focus Areas:

- Neighborhood-based family resource centers addressing community-specific stress indicators while utilizing existing community and civic strengths
- Community leadership capacity development for sustainable, resident-led problem-solving complementing professional service delivery
- Multi-generational support approaches coordinating health, education, and economic services through integrated community-based delivery
- Community support networks utilizing existing community assets while addressing identified stress concentration patterns

Critical Need:

Community-specific stress and health indicators (5.0 poor mental health days monthly, 30% reporting loneliness, increased anxiety-related emergency visits) require immediate attention through coordinated community resilience building that complements individual service improvements and addresses the underlying stressors affecting family engagement across all systems. Health access analysis reveals uninsured rates of 13.6%-17.1% in zip codes 27101, 27105, and 27107, indicating where community resilience approaches should integrate health navigation and support coordination.

Implementation Framework

These five interconnected priorities operate through five guiding principles that maximize Forsyth County's established strengths:

Sustainable Systems Focus on structural enhancements and capacity building that create lasting community improvement rather than temporary program interventions, maximizing proven organizational stability and collaborative commitment.	**Integrated Approach** Address multiple enhancement needs simultaneously through coordinated investment across workforce, economic, community, and system domains that maximize interconnected community strengths.	**Asset-Based Development** All investments utilize existing collaborative networks, organizational capacity, community assets, and proven service delivery excellence rather than creating parallel systems.	**Community Ownership** Engage diverse stakeholders in solution development while utilizing established backbone organization capacity for coordination and implementation support that draws on 30 years of collaborative expertise.	**Evidence-Based Enhancement** Utilize existing data infrastructure and community-engaged research capacity for continuous monitoring, evaluation, and strategic adjustment that capitalizes on demonstrated analytical capabilities.

VIII. Conclusion

This assessment reveals an early childhood system with exceptional foundational strengths positioned for expansion and enhancement. The community possesses what most communities struggle to develop—30 years of organizational stability, proven quality delivery infrastructure, established collaborative networks, and demographic predictability that enables targeted long-term investments.

The assessment identifies clear enhancement opportunities that build upon these substantial assets. While averages of 74% of children in family childcare homes and 76% of children in centers attend 4-5 star facilities, expanding this proven model to serve the 78.6% of families actively seeking access requires addressing substantial unmet community need, with current systems meeting only 27% of expressed community need. The community's collaborative infrastructure, community assets, and organizational expertise provide an exceptional foundation for systematic enhancement.

Current patterns reveal that capacity constraints, workforce sustainability needs, and educational continuity challenges represent investment opportunities rather than fundamental system deficiencies. The community's ability to maintain quality standards while managing substantial demand shows operational excellence that can inform expansion approaches. However, enrollment barriers preventing full utilization of existing programming require immediate attention to address workforce mobility due to compensation gaps, family cost burden consuming 27% of gross income, and access challenges that persist from early childhood through elementary grades, as evidenced by 32.1% chronic absenteeism rates and strained school support systems.

Triangulating quantitative trends with stakeholder experiences validates both the expansion potential and implementation capacity, revealing how community-level assets can support systematic enhancement when investment addresses enrollment barriers alongside service expansion. This approach shows that communities with strong collaborative infrastructure, institutional knowledge, and community commitment can model early childhood system development when data analysis builds upon stakeholder expertise and demonstrates that service accessibility, rather than program quality, influences family outcomes.

The path forward requires investment in workforce sustainability, economic access model innovation, community engagement enhancement, system integration, and community resilience building. These five interconnected priorities leverage existing community strengths while addressing critical sustainability challenges that prevent families from accessing the proven quality infrastructure the community has built over three decades.

Success requires coordinated investment that builds upon proven collaborative capacity while addressing fundamental enrollment barriers alongside economic sustainability challenges. The priorities identified provide a framework for coordinated enhancement that moves beyond service coordination toward structural accessibility, leveraging community assets for long-term transformation. Geographic analysis identifying specific areas with concentrated economic challenges and community assets provides targeted implementation guidance that maximizes resource efficiency while ensuring broad community impact.

With targeted investment and systematic implementation building on existing strengths, Forsyth County can model early childhood system enhancement that serves current and future generations while creating replicable approaches for other communities facing similar enrollment barrier and sustainability challenges. The community's proven quality delivery, collaborative expertise, and demographic stability provide unique advantages for creating lasting system improvements that honor existing excellence while ensuring broad community access to the quality programming families seek.

IX. Appendix: Zip Code Equity Table

Comprehensive County Equity Analysis

Priority Classification Methodology

Priority Level	Poverty Rate	Single-Parent %	Uninsured %	Combined Criteria
HIGH-PRIORITY	**>20%**	**>45%**	**>13%**	**Multiple indicators exceed county averages**
MODERATE-NEED	10-20%	40-52%	8-12%	Some indicators above county average
HIGHER-RESOURCE	<10%	<40%	<8%	Most indicators below county average

Area	Population[42]	Median Income[42]	Poverty Rate[43]	Single-Parent %[42]	Uninsured %[43]	Priority Level
Forsyth County	**392,821**	**$65,556**	**24.0%**	**41.2%**	**9.0%**	-
North Carolina	10,439,388	$70,834	19.6%	33.4%	8.6%	-
27105 *	30,977	$41,580	27.8%	64.1%	13.6%	HIGH-PRIORITY
27101	21,654	$44,611	25.0%	69.3%	17.1%	HIGH-PRIORITY
27107	40,834	$59,697	20.8%	47.3%	16.0%	HIGH-PRIORITY
27106	49,115	$66,091	14.0%	52.2%	8.3%	MODERATE-NEED
27103	36,023	$66,582	12.8%	56.1%	11.7%	MODERATE-NEED
27051	8,195	$70,825	12.0%	40.7%	7.9%	MODERATE-NEED
27127	39,809	$63,822	11.0%	52.5%	11.9%	MODERATE-NEED
27045	9,548	$70,945	10.0%	43.2%	10.3%	MODERATE-NEED
27023	13,214	$88,418	9.5%	32.3%	8.1%	HIGHER-RESOURCE
27284	56,859	$80,739	8.3%	39.6%	7.6%	HIGHER-RESOURCE
27040	12,409	$92,365	8.4%	30.1%	5.5%	HIGHER-RESOURCE
27012	20,854	$94,082	8.3%	18.5%	5.0%	HIGHER-RESOURCE
27050	1,929	$85,820	6.1%	22.5%	6.3%	HIGHER-RESOURCE
27009	2,860	$83,300	5.5%	23.3%	8.2%	HIGHER-RESOURCE

***zip codes cover countywide**

[42] U.S. Census Bureau. (2025). American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. [43] Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2025). Kids Count Data Center.

X. References

Primary Data Sources

Smart Start of Forsyth County. (2025). Community needs assessment survey. Forsyth County, North Carolina.

Secondary Data Sources

Demographic and Economic Data

- U.S. Census Bureau. (2025). American Community Survey 5-year estimates. Retrieved from https://data.census.gov
- North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management. (2025). North Carolina population projections and demographic data. Retrieved from https://osbm.nc.gov
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology. (2025). Living wage calculator. Retrieved from https://livingwage.mit.edu

Child and Family Outcomes

- Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2025). Kids Count data center. Retrieved from https://datacenter.aecf.org
- University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute. (2025). County health rankings and roadmaps. Retrieved from https://countyhealthrankings.org
- Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative. (2025). National Survey of Children's Health data. Retrieved from https://childhealthdata.org

Health and Social Services Data

- North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. (2025). State health and social services data. Retrieved from https://ncdhhs.gov
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2025). National health indicators and surveillance data. Retrieved from https://cdc.gov
- North Carolina State Center for Health Statistics. (2025). Vital statistics and health outcome data. Retrieved from https://schs.dph.ncdhhs.gov
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2016). Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Final Rule. 81 Fed. Reg. 67438.

Early Childhood and Education Data

- Early Years NC. (2025). Early childhood program enrollment and outcome data. Retrieved from https://earlyyearsnc.org
- My Future NC (2025). Chronic Absenteeism. Retrieved from https://dashboard.myfuturenc.org/college-and-career-access/chronic-absenteeism/
- North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. (2025). School performance and demographic data. Retrieved from https://apps.schools.nc.gov
- Child Care Services Association. (2024, January). Infant toddler care statewide factsheet. Retrieved from https://ccsa-research-repository.s3.amazonaws.com/factsheets/InfantToddlerCareSTATEWIDE2024January.pdf
- Heinemeier, S. (2018, January). Family Friend and Neighbor Care in Forsyth County: A Great Expectations Report. Compass Evaluation and Research, Inc. Commissioned by the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust. Durham, NC.

Methodological References

- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design. Harvard University Press.
- Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences (HOPE) National Resource Center. (n.d.). HOPE: Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experience. Retrieved September 2, 2025, from https://positiveexperience.org/