



North Carolina School-age Child Care Summit

April 10, 2024
Raleigh, NC



Report of the Proceedings

Summary

On April 10, 2024, the **NC Alliance of YMCAs**, the **NC Center for Afterschool Programs (NCCAP)** and the **NC Recreation and Park Association (NCRPA)** convened 26 child care providers, government agency staff and child care advocates at a summit to find common ground around providing quality care to school-age children in licensed out-of-school time (OST) programs. The desired meeting outcome was to reach consensus on strategies to pursue and to develop an action plan to achieve the identified strategies.

OST programs, such as before- and afterschool programs and summer day camp, provide enrichment opportunities for kids that complement their school learning, giving them an opportunity to form bonds with peers, while giving working parents peace of mind that their children are engaging in enriching, safe and fun activities that help them thrive.

Pediatricians agree that children under the age of 11 or 12 should not be left at home alone for safety reasons, and even children over the age of 12 benefit from enrichment after school, whether that is participating in sports, arts, science, or other activities that help them form peer and adult relationships while learning or honing skills according to their individual interests.

However, in North Carolina, child care licensure rules are written with the health, safety, and developmental needs of very young children (ages 0-5) in mind. Many of the existing health and safety rules should apply to school-age children as well, however, as children develop, they need more opportunity to exercise their independence skills in ways that younger children do not. The unintended consequence of licensing school-age programs with rules for young children is that it creates barriers and challenges for out-of-school time providers to license their programs. Some of the challenges faced by school-age providers were explored and are outlined in this document, as well as plans the group agreed to advance to mitigate these challenges and better serve families.

Licensure for more OST programs is the desired outcome.

- Licensure provides a measure of assurance that programs meet minimum health and safety standards, which is important to protect the health and well-being of our state's children.
- Licensure also increases access to child care subsidies for those families with the greatest financial need, which is an equity issue for our state's most vulnerable children.

To that end, Summit attendees agreed to a plan of action to move our state toward a set of school-age licensure standards that will meet the health, safety, and developmental needs of school-age children for OST programs.

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The State of Out-of-School Time Care

Jon Williams, Statewide School-age Project Manager with the Southwestern Child Development Commission, started the Summit with a presentation entitled “The State of OST Care.”

State law defines licensed school-age child care as:

- A program that provides care for children ages 5–12 for more than four hours per day,
- A seasonal program that operates between May 15–September 15 that wishes to receive child care subsidy payments.

Williams shared data from NCCAP’s and Dogwood Trust’s WNC After 3 PM report, which found that the most significant challenges out-of-school time programs face include:

- Student mental health support
- Staff mental health support and turnover
- Staff training and education
- Funding and resources
- Social emotional learning
- Transportation

Williams shared Student Mental Health and Behavior Data from the NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI) Suspension Data Report 2022, which found that two of 1,000 children are expelled from school, most of them male, African American and residing in high-poverty areas.

Additionally, the NC State Health Improvement Plan data shows that nearly one in four NC children have experienced two or more Adverse Childhood Experiences, with students of color over-represented in this population.

Regarding staffing in afterschool programs, average pay per hour is \$10.62 for group leaders and \$20.88 per hour for program coordinators. The top five reasons staff leave the field include the opportunity to make more money, professional growth, better benefits, better working conditions, and outside respect. The OST field has an attrition rate of 25%, while public schools are seeing attrition rates of 12%, with OST staff shifting to other positions, different industries, and part-time employment, as well as leaving the workforce altogether.

Top 5 Reasons Staff Leave School-age Child Care Programs

% of reported participants with multiple answers allowed



Source: NC Chamber 2024 Data

Meanwhile, enrollment is dropping in out-of-school time programs despite high demand. For every one child in afterschool care, there are three who desire to be in care, especially in rural, low-income, and migrant communities. Unfortunately, NC Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) data showed a 24.2% drop in school-age enrollment between 2019 and 2023, and this is due to the lack of workforce.

The average cost of afterschool care in North Carolina is \$6,453 a year or \$583 per month, which is 8% of income per child for a median earning NC family. 171,193 children are eligible for subsidized care in the state, yet most subsidies go to families with young children, as eligibility is set at 200% of federal poverty levels for children ages 0-5, and 133% for children 5-12. This is particularly challenging for families with children in both age ranges, as the family may qualify for subsidy for the younger child or children, and not qualify for the older child or children.

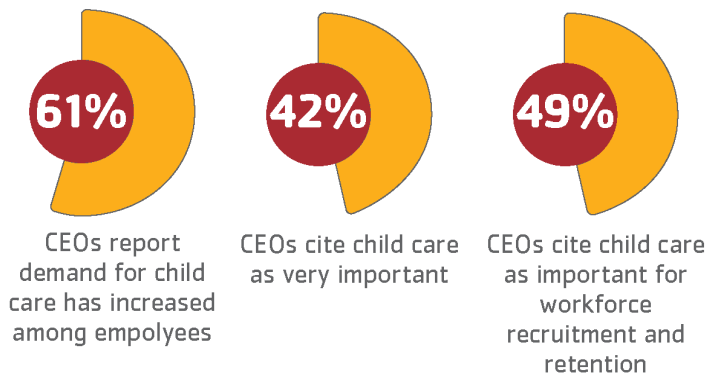
Support offered to afterschool programs include minimal assistance through TEACH Scholarship for Higher Education and Credential Support, community college support, professional development and support programs, and the pending evolution of DCDEE and Child Care Commission rules. Child Care Emergency Relief Wage enhancements have provided financial support, but those are due to expire by summer 2024. Several stakeholders are striving to raise the profile of the profession overall.

The business imperative for more school-age care is clear. In its 2024 survey of CEOs, the NC Chamber of Commerce found that a majority declared child care access critically important to their ability to recruit and retain employees, stave off absenteeism, and enhance productivity.

Child care subsidy is currently available to families of school-age children whose income is 133% of federal poverty level, whereas for families of young children qualify at 200% of federal poverty level.

This is particularly challenging for families with children in both age ranges, as the family may qualify for subsidy for the younger child or children, and not qualify for the older child or children.

The Business Imperative



Afterschool Program Benefits

- ▶ Afterschool programs provide a \$3 return for every \$1 invested
- ▶ 90% build social skills
- ▶ 70% access healthy snacks or meals
- ▶ 72% get homework help
- ▶ 76% engage in STEAM learning
- ▶ 84% participate in physical activity
- ▶ 81% learn life skills, like the ability to communicate

Lack of child care has the following negative consequences:



Source: NC Chamber 2024 Data

Child Care Licensing and Rules

Child care licensing protects children from harm and ensures program quality. **Yet, licensing rules and regulations were written to apply, in large part, to protect the health and safety of young children, those ages 0-5, even though nearly 45% of children supported with Child Care Development Funds are of school age.**

In 2022 the National Center on Afterschool and Summer Enrichment published a document and hosted a national webinar to reveal some of the opportunities to support school-age programs with child care licensing rules and regulations that more fully consider the developmental needs of school-age children and youth. They include:

- Staff and pre-service qualifications inclusive of school-age-related credentials and degrees
- Ongoing staff development inclusive of school-age topics
- Inclusion of appropriate curricula and programming for school-age children
- Health and safety training tailored to school-age children’s needs
- Nutrition and physical activity standards for school-age children

Other states have written a unique set of licensure rules and regulations specifically for the school-age population. Examples include **Nebraska, Vermont, Texas, and Arkansas.**

Here in North Carolina, OST providers struggle with:

- Educational credentials and pre-service requirements
 - OST staff are often not career child care workers; many are high school students, working their first jobs, and many are college students who are pursuing careers outside of child care, but they desire to work and develop skills while working at the YMCA or other OST providers.
- Quality rating options
 - Only one school-age accreditation currently included in NC statute is age or developmentally appropriate for school-age children (National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Academy for Early Childhood Program Accreditation), but the cost of that accreditation is more than \$20,000, making it unaffordable for nonprofit YMCAs and potentially other providers that want to utilize this path to demonstrate child care quality.
- Learning environments, activity area and programming
 - Due to the lack of flexibility in rules, OST providers face limitations in how they can deliver science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM) and other enrichment opportunities. For example, growing, preparing, and tasting fresh vegetables from an educational garden is not permitted for school-age children.
- Program quality limitations
 - Some health and safety standards limit program quality. As an example, even though OST programs may not prepare food, they are required to have a full kitchen available at each facility. Some OST programs use school buildings for programming. In those cases, existing school infrastructure is frequently insufficient to meet the required safety requirements (such as locked doors between cafeterias and kitchens).

Because equity is important to the Y’s mission, YMCAs raise funds through philanthropy in the communities they serve to ensure that children who need care and cannot afford it have access. Some YMCAs raise more than \$1M annually to ensure that children receive the care they need, and yet, the need is greater than philanthropic giving can cover. In more rural communities, fundraising is limited to the resources in those communities, thereby reinforcing the need for investment from outside sources to ensure children can receive services equitably.



YMCAs serve:

- 25,000+ kids in school-age care
- 169,000 in summer day camp
- 7,400 in non-summer day camp

Yet...Ys have only 27 licensed locations, mostly due to the challenges.

YMCA Child Care (2023-2024)	Monthly Scholarship	Annual Total	Annual Subsidy
YMCA of Southeastern NC	\$42,000	\$504,000	\$0
Alamance County Community YMCA	\$1,200	\$14,400	\$0
YMCA of Northwest NC	\$27,182	\$326,184	\$44,037
YMCA of the Triangle	\$64,000	\$768,000	\$0
YMCA of Western NC	\$84,666	\$1,016,000	\$1,905,000
Stanly County Family YMCA	\$4,623	\$55,476	\$0

**Group Think Activity:
Benefits, Costs and Challenges to More Flexible Licensure Rules**

During the afternoon, Summit participants worked in small groups to discuss:

- The benefits of more flexible rules for school-age care
- The costs of such changes
- The most significant challenges in enacting more flexible rules
- How to make the process easier
- What short-, intermediate- and long-term changes could be proposed.

Below is a summary of those discussions.

What are the benefits of having more flexible rules for school-age care? What are the costs?

BENEFITS

- Increased licensed spaces and locations
- Programs better meet the needs of youth offering life skills
- Increase in quality
- More employment opportunities
- Updated rules that aren't antiquated

COSTS

- Lower quality with increased safety incidents and inconsistency (with flexibility)

What are the most significant challenges we will face in enacting more flexible rules? What will make the process easier?

CHALLENGES

- Separating rules for early childhood and school-age children
- Education around changes in regulations
- Educating the legislature
- Community perceptions, misperceptions
- Convening of community partners/silo-breaking

- Shared language
- Institutional knowledge (sometimes lacking)
- Lack of consensus
- Time and resources for rules revision
- Creating flexibility without compromising quality, safety, compliance
- Silos in government
- Egos
- Is the state prepared for more licensed programs?
- More subsidy dollars needed to support more licensed program access
- Barriers to entry (cost, infrastructure, etc.)

PROMOTERS

- Expectations
- Collaborations
- Positive communication
- Strong examples from other states
- Training, assessments

Having heard about the greatest barriers, what short-term, intermediate-term, and longer-term changes can we propose?

SHORT-TERM CHANGES

- Modify subsidy eligibility to 85% of state median income for children of all ages
- Partnerships with more school systems across the state
- Community partner convening and sharing of best practices
- School property use
- Increase salary, materials, supplies
- Engage private investment
- Remove fear of licensure
- Remove administrative work of licensure
- Flexibility in building codes
- Build upon success during pandemic
- Waivers for financial burden/other community burdens

INTERMEDIATE-TERM CHANGES

- Make school-age accreditations and equivalency to Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) (American Camp Association or others)
- Rule changes that positively impact school-age care
- Consultants with school-age focus
- School-age rules and assessment
- Staff education requirements

LONG-TERM CHANGES

- Unique licensing rules for school-age programs

What is the best path to get us to each of these short-, intermediate- and long-term changes?



- Ability to apply for funds to upfit facilities
- Time/resources to review all; potential overhaul guidelines
- Non-political
- Tri-Share Model – employers, employees, state
- Community partnerships
- Specific to afterschool care – separate chapter in standards

After brainstorming the larger list, the group divided the desired outcomes this way:

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES

- Educate providers about resources available, example Center for Environmental Farming Systems (CEFS) Farm to Preschool
- Rule changes that positively impact school-age care
- Convening and sharing of best practices
- Collaborate with schools and the NC School Association of School Administrators regarding school property use
- Mentoring for licensure
- Family eligibility modified to 85% of state median income
- Common language and a unified front
- Data collection and effective storytelling regarding need and space
- Crosswalk accreditation with QRIS standards
- Dollars for facility upgrades/renovations
- Advocate for school-age care in the Tri-Share Model
- Increase access for school-age professional development
- Created educational pathways for school-age professionals

INTERMEDIATE-TERM OUTCOMES

- Modify staff education requirements
- Full school-age rule assessment
- Make school-age accreditations an equivalency for QRIS (e.g. American Camp Association, Weikart PQSA)
- 2025 Rules process
- Dollars for facility upgrade/renovation
- Include school-age care in Tri-Share Model expansion

LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

- Consultants with school-age focus
- Unique rules for school-age child care
- Coalition building
- Start-up funding
- Dollars for facility upgrades/renovations



Action Plan

The afternoon concluded with Action Planning around the top four short-term priorities:

What	Who	When
Family eligibility change (advocacy and lobbying needed)	General Assembly	By June 30
Crosswalk of QRIS with American Camp Association Accreditation Standards	Child Care Commission and YMCA	By April 2025
Collaboration with schools and NC Association of School Administrators (NCASA) around school property use	NCCAP, NC Alliance of YMCAs, NCRPA	ASAP and ongoing
Create educational pathways for school-age staff	Community colleges and stakeholders	By June 2025

Summit participants included:

Child Care Services Association

Children and Families First, NC Child Care Resource & Referral

NC Alliance of YMCAs

NC Child

NC Community College System

NC DHHS, DCDEE

NC Licensed Child Care Association

NC Recreation and Park Association

Rep. Willis' Office

Southwestern Child Development Commission

Stanly Community College

YMCA of Catawba Valley

YMCA of Greater Charlotte

YMCA of Greensboro

YMCA of Northwest North Carolina, NC Child Care Commission

YMCA of Northwest North Carolina

YMCA of the Triangle

YMCA of Western North Carolina

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