

Ready for *School*, Ready for *Life*

Focusing Guilford's efforts
on young children and parents



Preparing children to be **ready to learn** saves **education** dollars, **social service** dollars, and **criminal justice** dollars.

The *first years* are critical.

By the time a child reaches age five, research shows that life's experiences have set the stage for future development.

Children who have been well-nurtured at home, who have enjoyed positive and stimulating childcare environments, and who have learned to interact appropriately with others, stand a far greater chance of completing their basic education and entering adulthood ready to contribute and to succeed.

In Guilford County, we spend much time and effort, and many dollars, in attempts to help teens. We want to keep teens in school and out of trouble. Yet our school drop-out rate stubbornly refuses to drop significantly,

and our courts and criminal justice system remain over-burdened with new offenders. While these are important efforts, researchers and economists have demonstrated that investing in the early years provides for the most cost-effective and long-lasting results.

We believe that Guilford County can prepare children for success in school and success in life through better coordination and expansion of existing programs, while redirecting certain resources to focus on the critical years up to age five.

We believe that the people of Guilford County – parents, teachers, and citizens – can find ways to work together to help our youngest children become ready for school and ready for life.



All children are born with the **capacity to learn.** It is what happens **between birth and the fifth birthday** that determines whether or not children will enter school prepared **for school success.** These early years are the most robust, yet vulnerable years of life.

– C. Chris Payne, Ph.D.
Acting Director,
Research Associate Professor
Center for Youth, Family,
and Community Partnerships
University of North Carolina
Greensboro

Why children should be *ready to learn*.



In the first few days of each new school year, kindergarten teachers can identify those children who have arrived ready to learn.

Children who are ready to learn arrive full of energy and curiosity, and have the social skills to interact appropriately with classmates and adults.

Children who are ready to learn have expanding vocabularies and express themselves well. They are familiar with the printed page and already know the joy that books and stories provide.

Children who are ready to learn already have a sense of self, which is crucial to their development and which can only be acquired through interactions with caring, trustworthy adults.

Children who enter kindergarten ready to learn:

- adjust to school positively and achieve greater success in later grades.
- require fewer services for exceptional children and are more likely to progress to higher grades on schedule.
- are more likely to demonstrate positive behavior.
- narrow the achievement gap often associated with disadvantaged children.
- are less likely in later years to get into trouble with school authorities or break the law. Girls are less likely to become pregnant while still in school.

Communities that do a better job of getting children ready to learn spend less to see children become responsible adults than communities that focus on correcting problems with teens and young adults.

Simply put, preparing children to be ready to learn saves education dollars, social service dollars and criminal justice dollars.



Why *positive parenting* matters.

Children learn about the world and their place in it through relationships, and their most important relationship is with their parents.

Positive parenting builds a strong parent-child relationship that is critical to the development of a child's social and emotional wellness.

The strong foundation provided by positive parenting helps children form satisfying relationships with others. Well-nurtured children are better able to communicate and play with other children, as well as with adults. They are better able to learn, to face challenges and manage their emotions.

The relationships formed by positive parenting are crucial for the development of trust, empathy, compassion, generosity and conscience. These lay the groundwork for moral and civic behavior later in life.

In order for parents to succeed in their most important role, they need information and support. Research clearly demonstrates that providing parents with educational programs, nurse-home visitation services, and mental health support promotes positive parenting.

Positive parenting can affect a child's:

- healthy emotional development.
- physical development and health.
- level of maturity, ability to influence others and ability to manage stress.
- cognitive development, including curiosity, problem-solving skills and self-direction.

Positive parenting has a critical impact on a child entering school ready to learn.

Children who are nurtured from their earliest stages of development have the best chances of achieving life-long success.

– Budgeting for National Priorities,
The Brookings Institution



Why *quality childcare* matters.

More than 40 percent of American children under the age of five spend some time in organized childcare situations. A common goal is to find childcare that provides comfort, safety and security for infants, toddlers and preschoolers.

Quality childcare should offer a nurturing and stimulating educational environment.

Components of quality childcare include:

- optimum teacher-child ratios.
- standards for educational levels of teachers and training in child development.
- years of experience and staff stability (low turnover).
- teacher wages and benefit compensation packages.
- a safe, healthy and stimulating physical environment with appropriate toys, furniture and outdoor play areas.
- nurturing interactions between teachers and children and positive guidance for peer interaction. This is the most important aspect of quality childcare and has the greatest impact on future success in school and life.

Quality childcare and early education programs can particularly benefit children from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

High-quality childcare is associated with:

- strong relationships with teachers, self-regulation and positive peer relationships.
- cognitive development and academic readiness skills, especially language and literacy.
- higher graduation rates and higher employment rates.
- lower spending for social services and criminal justice.



The single most important factor in early education and care is the relationship between the child and the caregiver.

– Carnegie Corporation of New York

Guilford *must invest* in early childhood.

To achieve their maximum potential, children need supportive opportunities at home, including sensitive and responsive parents, and access to quality preschool programs. When children enter school ready to learn, their future academic success – and their likelihood to become responsible, successful adults – is greatly increased.

Investments in early childhood generate substantial financial returns, producing **a rate of return of about 16 percent a year more than traditional economic development projects**, according to the Partnership for America's Economic Success.

Thanks to our project partners, including the following community case management, home visitation, and parenting programs:

- Maternity Care Coordination*
- Child Service Coordination*
- Family Care Coordination*
- Universal Newborn Home Visit*
- Nurse Family Partnership**
- Parents as Teachers
- Healthy Start – Family Services of the Piedmont
- Family Support Network
- Children's Developmental Services Agency
- Adopt-A-Mom
- Bringing Out the Best
- Family Life Council
- Fairview Family Resource Center
- Adolescent Parenting Program (YWCA, Greensboro)

* Guilford County Health Department

** Guilford Child Development

Recommendations

- Establish a Positive Parenting Collaborative among service providers to enhance communication and coordination of services; set priorities to serve first those families with the greatest need; refine procedures to eliminate duplication of efforts.
- Engage private, public, and business sectors to seek new ways to support quality early education and childcare programs for all children from birth through age five.
- Expand nurse-home visitation programs. Experience and research reveal that these visits are most successful in promoting sound prenatal care and the healthy development of infants and toddlers.
- Support a mental health initiative for expanded and more effective mental health services for mothers and young children.

Ready for School, Ready for Life is an initiative within the Center for Youth, Family and Community Partnerships at UNCG. The Center is a research institute within the Office of Research & Public/Private Sector Partnerships, builds the capacity of families, service providers, researchers, teachers and communities to ensure the health and well-being of children.

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For more information please visit www.uncg.edu/crs/.



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