



NC Justice Center

*Opportunity
and prosperity for all*

BTC Brief

► NC BUDGET & TAX CENTER

March 2012

PRIVATIZING PRE-K:

A move that would disproportionately impact rural, high-poverty counties

*Timely,
accessible,
and credible
analysis of
state and local
budget and tax
issues*

KEY FINDINGS:

- **Public schools play a major role in North Carolina's Pre-K program. In 17 counties, 100 percent of the Pre-K slots are in public schools.**
- **All 17 of these counties are rural, and a majority of them are high-poverty.**
- **More than half (58) of the state's counties rely on public schools to host and manage more than half of their Pre-K slots. Only 6 out of these 58 counties are not rural.**
- **Rural, high-poverty counties do not have robust networks of private child-care centers, and therefore privatizing Pre-K would limit access to the program in these areas.**

AUTHOR:

Louisa B. Warren
919/856-2183
louisa@ncjustice.org

North Carolina
Justice Center
P.O. Box 28068
Raleigh, NC
27611-8068

www.ncjustice.org

The NC General Assembly's House Select Committee on Early Childhood Education Improvement recently considered a proposal to privatize North Carolina's Pre-K program slots. Currently, the NC Division of Child Development and Early Education administers the Pre-K program for at-risk four-year olds at the state level, and a range of local entities can apply to the division to become Pre-K providers if they meet teacher- and site-quality standards. Eligible entities include Head Start programs, Head Start programs administered by public schools, private for-profit child-care centers, private non-profit child-care centers, and public schools.

North Carolina's Pre-K program was designed to meet the goal of building a strong connection between Pre-K and the K-12 system, and as such, public schools have historically hosted the majority of Pre-K classrooms. Data from the NC Division of Child Development and Early Education show that barring public schools from serving as Pre-K providers could disproportionately impact rural, high-poverty counties (**see Table 1**). In particular, rural counties rely on local school administrative units to administer and host Pre-K classrooms because the networks of private child-care providers in rural areas are not as robust as the networks in urban counties.

In 17 counties, 100 percent of all Pre-K slots were in public school settings as of January 2012. Of these counties, all of them are rural and the majority of them have poverty rates higher than the state average of 17.4 percent. Just six of the counties that rely completely on public schools for their Pre-K programs—Perquimans, Polk, Moore, Jones, Dare, and Clay—have poverty rates less than the state average for all people; however, the child poverty rates in these counties are 24 percent or greater.

More than half of all of North Carolina's counties (58) rely on public schools to host the majority (51 percent or more) of their Pre-K slots. Only 6 of these 58 counties are not rural—Alamance, Catawba, Davidson, Forsyth, Gaston, and New Hanover.

Currently, public schools play a major role in providing the infrastructure, administration, and high-quality teachers for North Carolina's Pre-K program. Prohibiting them from managing and hosting Pre-K slots could have an immediate impact on rural, high-poverty counties in the state. Access to Pre-K could be limited in a majority of the North Carolina's counties as a result, negatively affecting children's education in the short and long terms.

TABLE 1: Rural, poor counties rely heavily on public schools for administration of Pre-K programs

COUNTY <i>(Counties shaded light blue are classified as rural counties)</i>	PRE-K PROGRAM SLOTS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS			POVERTY BY COUNTY		COUNTY <i>(Counties shaded light blue are classified as rural counties)</i>	PRE-K PROGRAM SLOTS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS			POVERTY BY COUNTY	
	# of Pre-K Slots in Public School Settings	Total # of Pre-K Slots in County	% of total Pre-K slots in Public School Settings	Poverty Rate (%)	Child Poverty Rate (%)		# of Pre-K Slots in Public School Settings	Total # of Pre-K Slots in County	% of total Pre-K slots in Public School Settings	Poverty Rate (%)	Child Poverty Rate (%)
Alamance	181	353	51.27%	18.5	29.0	Jones	60	60	100.00%	18.4	31.8
Alexander	0	95	0.00%	16.9	25.7	Lee	108	246	43.90%	18.6	28.1
Alleghany	54	54	100.00%	23.0	33.9	Lenoir	83	207	40.10%	23.2	35.6
Anson	27	128	21.09%	22.6	32.3	Lincoln	54	155	34.84%	15.0	22.9
Ashe	76	129	58.91%	20.0	30.2	Macon	18	83	21.69%	19.3	31.2
Avery	71	77	92.21%	23.5	33.9	Madison	0	36	0.00%	19.7	28.1
Beaufort	70	144	48.61%	20.7	32.3	Martin	58	94	61.70%	23.4	37.4
Bertie	134	134	100.00%	27.0	39.1	McDowell	116	134	86.57%	19.9	29.6
Bladen	203	203	100.00%	22.3	31.2	Mecklenburg	551	1482	37.18%	15.6	21.3
Brunswick	0	339	0.00%	16.5	26.1	Mitchell	0	34	0.00%	18.5	28.2
Buncombe	64	264	24.24%	17.1	24.2	Montgomery	102	173	58.96%	24.6	34.3
Burke	270	371	72.78%	18.7	26.6	Moore	42	42	100.00%	16.6	26.0
Cabarrus	187	387	48.32%	12.5	16.6	Nash	150	224	66.96%	15.6	24.7
Caldwell	58	126	46.03%	18.4	28.5	New Hanover	360	525	68.57%	18.1	23.2
Camden	0	29	0.00%	9.7	13.4	Northampton	86	104	82.69%	22.5	34.8
Carteret	74	152	48.68%	14.1	23.6	Onslow	0	528	0.00%	15.8	22.0
Caswell	0	43	0.00%	20.8	30.2	Orange	49	227	21.59%	17.4	17.4
Catawba	248	284	87.32%	14.5	23.3	Pamlico	40	58	68.97%	15.2	29.9
Chatham	152	215	70.70%	14.2	21.5	Pasquotank	59	99	59.60%	22.9	31.3
Cherokee	81	100	81.00%	18.1	32.8	Pender	48	159	30.19%	16.7	25.1
Chowan	46	60	76.67%	21.1	33.6	Perquimans	35	35	100.00%	16.4	29.4
Clay	40	40	100.00%	18.8	32.0	Person	13	97	13.40%	16.4	24.8
Cleveland	206	375	54.93%	20.9	32.3	Pitt	357	451	79.16%	21.6	26.6
Columbus	244	330	73.94%	26.9	40.8	Polk	72	72	100.00%	14.4	24.7
Craven	70	179	39.11%	17.5	25.1	Randolph	193	263	73.38%	18.1	26.9
Cumberland	431	1531	28.15%	18.2	26.4	Richmond	139	205	67.80%	28.1	37.7
Currituck	30	38	78.95%	11.1	18.1	Robeson	447	856	52.22%	31.5	45.5
Dare	86	86	100.00%	12.3	24.0	Rockingham	107	203	52.71%	18.5	27.2
Davidson	172	333	51.65%	17.3	26.3	Rowan	128	267	47.94%	20.1	29.0
Davie	115	162	70.99%	14.0	21.6	Rutherford	178	243	73.25%	25.0	33.5
Duplin	47	204	23.04%	23.7	32.8	Sampson	283	319	88.71%	21.4	31.2
Durham	89	420	21.19%	18.4	24.2	Scotland	121	235	51.49%	27.2	38.1
Edgecombe	230	345	66.67%	24.5	38.7	Stanly	36	289	12.46%	15.4	22.4
Forsyth	341	569	59.93%	16.7	24.2	Stokes	79	172	45.93%	14.3	21.8
Franklin	21	71	29.58%	16.0	22.3	Surry	153	207	73.91%	19.3	30.8
Gaston	420	753	55.78%	19.9	27.7	Swain	63	76	82.89%	18.5	28.0
Gates	31	31	100.00%	17.5	24.1	Transylvania	0	52	0.00%	15.9	28.9
Graham	23	45	51.11%	22.5	34.2	Tyrrell	18	18	100.00%	28.7	43.3
Granville	108	111	97.30%	15.5	19.9	Union	0	437	0.00%	9.2	13.1
Greene	77	86	89.53%	23.7	35.1	Vance	91	122	74.59%	24.3	35.5
Guilford	909	1839	49.43%	17.9	26.7	Wake	124	992	12.50%	12.0	15.2
Halifax	209	209	100.00%	26.2	36.7	Warren	78	78	100.00%	27.1	36.0
Harnett	18	247	7.29%	16.7	24.3	Washington	61	61	100.00%	22.4	37.3
Haywood	45	126	35.71%	14.6	25.2	Watauga	85	85	100.00%	24.8	21.4
Henderson	0	156	0.00%	15.8	24.6	Wayne	178	543	32.78%	19.7	28.7
Hertford	143	143	100.00%	26.1	35.5	Wilkes	350	358	97.77%	19.9	27.2
Hoke	234	334	70.06%	19.0	26.3	Wilson	0	137	0.00%	22.9	34.5
Hyde	35	35	100.00%	21.9	29.7	Yadkin	86	139	61.87%	15.1	23.6
Iredell	93	259	35.91%	13.3	17.9	Yancey	0	36	0.00%	20.3	31.2
Jackson	0	27	0.00%	19.3	25.7						
Johnston	68	347	19.60%	16.1	22.8						
North Carolina	10919	21778	50.14%	17.4	24.6						

NOTES: Shaded counties are those classified as "rural" as defined by North Carolina § 143B-437.45 (6) or a county with a density of fewer than 250 people per square mile based on the 2000 U.S. decennial census. Pre-K classrooms can be located in five settings: Head Start Program, Head Start Program Administered by Public School, Private for-profit child care center, Private non-profit child care center, or a Public School. For the purposes of this analysis, the number of Pre-K slots located in settings other than Public Schools are not included in this table but the data is available upon request. SOURCES: Rural county designation from U.S. Census Bureau population density data; Pre-K slot data from the N.C. Division of Child Development and Early Education by special data request; Poverty and child poverty rate from U.S. Census Bureau, Small Area Estimates Branch, released November 2011.