



[PreKPriority.org](http://PreKPriority.org)

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Contact: Laura Burrows, Two B Public Relations

[laura@twobpr.com](mailto:laura@twobpr.com), 336.575.6757

**The Pre-K Priority Launches Community Campaign Encouraging Local Families to Register for Pre-K**

*Initiative wants to see children back in Pre-K classrooms after 30 percent drop in enrollment statewide due to COVID-19 pandemic*

**WINSTON-SALEM, NC (March 9, 2022)** – This month, more than 10,000 families with young children across Forsyth County will receive postcards encouraging them to consider registering for Pre-K and inviting them to visit a new online community resource for navigating local Pre-K options. It's the first phase of a public awareness campaign led by The Pre-K Priority to support and connect families with free, public Pre-K programs as well as private-pay offerings.

"During the pandemic, North Carolina experienced a 30 percent drop in Pre-K enrollment which is an extraordinary statistic when you consider that in the years prior, we had waiting lists for those same programs," said Katura Jackson, executive director of the Child Care Resource Center and a member of The Pre-K Priority Task Force. She, along with other education, social service, faith and business leaders, are developing community programs and strategies to ensure every family has access to quality Pre-K programs for their children.

"It's so valuable for children to participate in a quality Pre-K program before entering kindergarten," said Jackson. "Unfortunately, many children are not getting that opportunity, and issues of access have only worsened during the pandemic. It's more important than ever that The Pre-K Priority is stepping into this gap and helping to connect families with the right resources and programs for their young children."

As a first point of information for families, The Pre-K Priority has launched a new webpage, [www.prekpriority.org/register](http://www.prekpriority.org/register), that walks through the steps of registering for a Pre-K program. The webpage is linked to registration information for free, public Pre-K programs offered by WS/FCS, Smart Start and Head Start as well as to [Child Care Resource Center](#) that connects families with local public as well as private-pay Pre-K programs.

"Pre-K programs serve as a way to 'level the playing field' and begin to tackle the issue of equity," said Louis Finney, CEO of Smart Start of Forsyth County and a member of The Pre-K Priority Task force. "Not only does a Pre-K education aid in the most crucial years of a child's brain growth and development, but the benefits of receiving this education appear down the road as well."

Smart Start along with Head Start and WS/FCS all offer Pre-K teams who work alongside families to complete the registration application. "For families who have not registered a child for school in the past, it can feel hard so we're going the extra mile to ensure they have someone helping them at every step in the process," said Finney.

It's important for the community to rally behind Pre-K registration. "It's going to take a concerted effort not just from those of us who work in the Pre-K space but from families, neighbors and friends to encourage and engage those who have children who will be 4 years old on or before August 31, 2022, to learn more about their Pre-K options," said Finney. "We want to see those children in the classrooms, learning, playing and working together. We also know that if there's no increase in demand, it's very hard to hold onto the programs we do have. The pandemic made it very difficult for private-pay Pre-K centers to keep their doors open, and at the same time,

public Pre-K resources like NC Pre-K rely on enrollment data to determine how many classrooms a certain county will get. Having full Pre-K classrooms in Forsyth County for the coming school year strengthens our position to expand NC Pre-K classrooms in the future and ensures we maintain a full breadth of public and private-pay options.”

The current Pre-K public awareness initiative is the second full-scale community campaign led by The Pre-K Priority. The group, which was first established in 2014 and housed at Family Services of Forsyth County, began its work focused on building awareness for the value of Pre-K. It produced a series of reports on the local Pre-K landscape as well as reports looking at key barriers and equity issues facing families in accessing Pre-K resources. The group also hosted a series of Community Conversations around Pre-K involving community, education and business leaders. Many of those leaders became strong advocates for the work of The Pre-K Priority and are now members of the newly formed Task Force led by Forsyth County Commissioner Don Martin and WS/FCS Superintendent Tricia McManus.

“As a father of seven boys, I appreciate the importance of having a strong start to the educational journey,” said Forsyth County Sheriff Bobby Kimbrough. “When I learned about the work of The Pre-K Priority, I knew immediately that I wanted to be involved in a significant way. Now, more than ever, we need to let our children know that our community is rallying around them and investing in them. These children who are starting off in Pre-K, they are our future. I want to do everything in my power to help put them on the right path.”

Pre-K registration for free, public programs such as NC Pre-K is now underway. Families complete a single application for all WS/FCS, Head Start and Smart Start/NC Pre-K locations. More information available at [www.prekpriority.org/register](http://www.prekpriority.org/register).

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