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Access to Quality Child Care and Parent Education Voted Among Top Priorities for Young Children in Central North Carolina

*Wake County Delegation helped determine priorities as part of
Smart Investing summit on March 9*

DURHAM – Access to high-quality child care, parent education programs, availability of programs and services to meet basic needs, and exposure to enriching experiences outside of child care settings were voted the top priorities that would make the greatest, lasting impact on the lives of young children in central North Carolina. The voting took place at the **Smart Investing: Communities Thrive When Children Thrive** summit in Durham on March 9. More than 200 community members from central North Carolina, including a delegation from Wake County, determined that these are the primary issues community groups and policymakers should focus on to improve the lives of young children. The group also brainstormed action steps to make the priorities a reality locally.

Tuesday's summit reconvened delegates from central counties who are part of the Smart Investing public engagement initiative. Funded by the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation and with support from Lt. Governor Walter Dalton and Smart Start, **Smart Investing: Communities Thrive When Children Thrive**, brings together a diverse mix of citizens in communities throughout the state to determine how best to invest in children birth to five, and thereby the state as a whole.

The final votes reflect work that began last fall when Smart Start's 77 partnerships leveraged their networks to assemble delegations of local parents, business leaders, health care providers, education professionals and policy makers representing every county. The delegations created a list of top priorities at local forums held across the state. Tuesday, participants were asked to narrow down the list to the top four priorities that if given time, attention, and resources by individuals, community, and government, would make the greatest lasting impact on preparing young children to become productive, healthy, and fully-engaged adults.

"These priorities reflect the needs in our community, especially within the area of quality early childhood education," said Pam Dowdy, Wake County SmartStart executive director. "Parent education as well as the need for quality education is an ever-present issue in Wake County. As a group of active participants, we can work together to improve the lives of countless children in our community."

The Wake County delegation included: Pam Dowdy, executive director, Wake County SmartStart; David Zonderman, Ph.D., board chair, Wake County SmartStart and professor of History at North Carolina State University; Kim Shaw, business owner, A Safe Place; Roz Savitt, public policy consultant and lobbyist, N.C. Child Care Coalition; Susan Alexander, community volunteer, The Lucy Daniels Center; Sharon Collins, Literacy Department senior administrator, Wake County Public School System.

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www.smartinvestingnc.org

Smart Start is North Carolina's early childhood leadership network dedicated to assuring that every child reaches his or her potential and is prepared for success in a global community. For more information, visit www.ncsmartstart.org.