

**Wake County Smart Start
NC Pre-K Committee Meeting
August 27, 2025**

A meeting of the Wake County Smart Start (WCSS) NC Pre-K Committee was held on Wednesday, August 27, 2025, with Chair Nikia Coates presiding.

Pre-K Committee Members present: André Anthony, Kelsey Camarena, Nikia Coates, Veronica Creech, Dawn Dawson, Ariel Ford, Matthew Glova, Jason Horton, Nikki Leonard, Kerry McCarthy Adams, Ronetta Pearsall, Stephanie Shell, Tonya Venable, Joe White, Katherine Williams, Michele Woodson.

Pre-K Committee Members absent: Matthew Ellinwood, Susan Evans, Mickey Holt, Cheryl Stallings, Antonia Pedroza.

Guests present: Katie Lewis.

Staff Members present: Gayle E. Headen, Robert Linens, Alejandra Livas-Dlott, Carol Orji, Gary Carr, Taushau Wilkinson,

Call to Order/Announcements

At 8:30 AM, Nikia Coates announced a quorum was present and officially called the meeting to order. She noted the presence of staff.

Ms. Coates requested a motion to adopt the agenda. Katherine Williams moved to adopt the agenda. Matt Glova seconded the motion. Calling for a vote and with none opposed, the motion carried. (8-27-01)

Ms. Coates requested a motion to approve minutes from the June 25, 2025, meeting. Matt Glova moved to approve the minutes of the June 25, 2025, meeting. Michele Woodson seconded the motion. Calling for a vote and hearing no objection, the motion carried. (8-27-02)

Executive Director's Report

Gayle Headen stated that the August NC Pre-K is a busy month to receive recommendations for approval. She shared that the NC Pre-K Committee is the governing body for the NC Pre-K program in each community.

The first item for consideration is the NC Pre-K meeting schedule for FY25-26. Ms. Coates called for a motion to approve the NC Pre-K Committee meeting schedule for the 2025-2026 school year. Katherine Williams moved to approve the NC Pre-K 2025-2026 Committee meeting schedule for the 2025 – 2026 school year on the accompanying chart. Kerry Camarena seconded the motion. Hearing no opposition, the motion carried. (8-27-03)

The second item for consideration is the Wake County Smart Start Conflict of Interest Policy. It commits to making conflicts known. Ms. Coates called for a motion for approval of the WCSS Conflict of Interest Policy. Michele Woodson made a motion for approval of the Wake County Smart Start Conflict of Interest Policy. Veronica Creech seconded the motion. With no opposition, the motion carried. (8-27-04)

The third item for consideration is the NC Pre-K Plan and Assurances, the document that governs the actions of the NC Pre-K Committee according to the NC Pre-K Program Guidelines. Ms. Coates called for a motion to approve the recommendation. Ariel Ford moved to approve the recommendation of NC Pre-K Committee acknowledgment and signatory-review of the NC Pre-K Requirements and Assurances (Assurances) as required by the Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) for contracting 1,532 slots in FY2025 – 26 and confirms WCSS as the contracting agency for the NC Pre-K Program. Jason Horton seconded the motion. The motion carried with no opposition. (8-27-05)

The fourth item for consideration is the staff-to-child ratio cap for Wake County to be one staff to every nine children to maintain and enhance the quality of education provided to children in the program. NC Pre-K as a program allows for a higher ratio, but WCSS staff feel very strongly that they maintain the 1 to 9 ratio. Ms. Ford noted that the General Assembly made this change to the law approximately two

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sessions ago against the desires of the department and advocates. Ms. Headen confirmed that the proposed ratio is what DCDEE preferred and would have recommended. Ms. Coates called for a motion. Ms. Ford moved for approval of the recommendation to cap the staff-to-child ratio at 1 to 9 to maintain and enhance the quality of care and education provided to children in NC Pre-K classrooms allowing for more individualized support, improved classroom management, and more nurturing learning environment for the children. Ms. McCarthy Adams seconded the motion. Abstentions: Dawn Dawson, Jason Horton, Ronetta Pearsall, Tonya Venable and Michele Woodson. With no opposition, the motion carried. (8-27-06)

The fifth item for consideration is approval of the NC Pre-K Plan Requirements. This is a recommendation for the Committee to approve a series of plans that will enhance the high quality of the NC Pre-K program. After questions, Ms. Coates requested a motion to approve the NC Pre-K Requirements recommendations. Veronica Creech made a motion for approval of NC Pre-K Plan Requirements:

Plans requiring approval include:

Prevention of Suspension/Expulsion of Children with Challenging Behavior: to ensure that families have access to appropriate resources and supports in order to maintain their child's placement in NC Pre-K.

Transportation Plan: to encourage programs to annually research and review community transportation options – including public, school and family transportation in order to provide families with resources and opportunities as available.

Transition Plan: to indicate how programs respond to the needs of children and families as they move into Pre-Kindergarten and later into kindergarten.

Family Engagement Plan: to implement strategies designed to develop partnerships with families and including the following components:

- Home visits
- Enrolling families into Ready Rosie - an online evidence-informed and research-based family engagement and early learning resource tool
- Formal and informal family/teacher conferences
- Opportunities for families to participate in classroom activities
- Family education
- Opportunities for family involvement in decision making about their child and their child's early childhood program
- Opportunities for families to engage outside of the regular school day

Communicating with Children and Families who are Dual Language Learners: to implement center strategies that engage, support, and inform all families.

Katherine Williams seconded the motion. Hearing no objections, the motion passed. (8-27-07)

The sixth recommendation to the Committee allows Wake County Public Schools be allowed to charge families for the full or reduced cost of meals for children who do not qualify for free meals. After discussion, Ms. Coates called for a motion to approve the recommendation. Katherine Williams moved to approve the WCSS recommendation that WCPSS be allowed to charge families the full or reduced cost of meals for children that do not qualify for free meals as indicated on the chart below:

	<u>Reduced Price</u>	<u>Full Price</u>
<u>Breakfast</u>	<u>\$0.30</u>	<u>\$2.00</u>

<u>Lunch</u>	<u>\$0.40</u>	<u>\$3.75</u>
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Nikki Leonard seconded the motion. Abstentions: Dawn Dawson, Jason Horton, Ronetta Pearsall, Tonya Venable and Michele Woodson. With no opposition, the motion carried. (8-27-08)

The final recommendation from WCSS Staff is for the approval of reimbursement rates for the 2025-26 school year according to the schedule; approval of the DCDEE grant allocation; placement of 1,532 NC Pre-K slots for the 2025-26 school year; approval to authorize WCSS staff to reallocate vacant slots as needed based on geographic location of applying families most eligible for services; and approval of any transportation costs as indicated. Ms. Coates called for a motion. Matt Glova made a motion for:

- Approval of reimbursement rates for the 2025-26 school year as indicated below:

	<u>2024-2025</u>	<u>Recommended 2025-2026</u>
<u>Private childcare rates based on Lead Teacher Qualification of those fully licensed</u>	<u>\$1,346 / Child/Month</u>	<u>\$1,368 / Child/Month</u>
<u>Private childcare rates based on Lead Teachers who are working towards full licensures</u>	<u>\$1,286 /Child/Month</u>	<u>\$1,308 /Child/Month</u>
<u>Private childcare rates for lead long-term substitute</u>	<u>\$920 / Child/Month</u>	<u>\$920 / Child/Month</u>
<u>Private childcare with WCPSS-funded teacher rates</u>	<u>\$719 / Child/Month</u>	<u>\$719 / Child/Month</u>
<u>WCPSS enhancement rate</u>	<u>\$496 / Child/Month</u>	<u>\$496 / Child/Month</u>
<u>Head Start enhancement rate</u>	<u>\$420 /Child/Month</u>	<u>\$420 /Child/Month</u>

- Approval of the DCDEE grant allocation of \$10,386,990 for FY 2025-26 to support the NC Pre-K program. The total budget for NC PreK is \$16,539,992. The total budget consists of funding from DCDEE, Smart Start, Wake County, and Unrestricted Funds.
- The placement of 1,532 NC Pre-K slots for the 2025-26 school year as outlined on the accompanying chart, H.2 (also shown below).
- Approval to authorize WCSS staff to reallocate vacant slots as needed based on the geographic location of applying families most eligible for services.
- Approval of any transportation costs as indicated in the attached chart, H.2.

Veronica Creech seconded the motion. Abstentions: Dawn Dawson, Jason Horton, Ronetta Pearsall, Tonya Venable and Michele Woodson. With no opposition, the motion carried. (8-27-09)

Ms. Headen thanked everyone who asked questions during the meeting.

Updates

Ms. Headen reported that so far in 2025, the WCSS NC Pre-K Team has placed 838 children, and the slots are 84% full. At last report, the Wake County Public School slots are completely full, and Head Start only had one slot left. Ms. Headen noted that, across the state, many counties are seeing challenges with their enrollments, so this is a great accomplishment given the broader context. Ms. Headen shared that

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one of the contributors to the results was that the Pre-K team developed a data driven plan to process applications from areas of need using our technology. Part is phone calling, text messaging, and application processing, which has resulted in measurable outcomes.

The last update from Ms. Headen is that the NC Pre-K staff is conducting focused parent interviews to better understand and address the challenges of the high incidence of missing documents, which is a tracked data point. WCSS staff is working with parents to understand the causes with the goal of creating solutions and removing barriers to service.

Ms. Williams asked for the data from the interviews to be brought to the committee. Ms. Headen agreed to do that.

Ms. Coates reminded Committee Members that the Conflict of Interest and Assurances forms would be going out for signature.

With no further business to discuss, Ms. Coates asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Matt Glova moved to adjourn the meeting. Nikki Leonard seconded the motion. Calling for a vote and hearing no objections, the meeting was adjourned by Ms. Coates at 9:15 AM. (8-27-10)

Signed by:

Matt Ellinwood

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