

**Wake County Smart Start  
NC Pre-K Committee Meeting  
October 22, 2025**

A meeting of the Wake County Smart Start (WCSS) NC Pre-K Committee was held on Wednesday, October 22, 2025, with Chair Nikia Coates presiding.

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

Pre-K Committee Members absent: Dawn Dawson, Matthew Ellinwood, Stephanie Shell, Cheryl Stallings, Antonia Pedroza.

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

Guests present: Roberta Hill, Katie Lewis

**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 and guests.

Ms. Coates announced the December retirement of Dawn Dawson, Senior Director Office of Early Learning, Wake County Public Schools after 32 years of service. She, Gayle E. Headen, and Joan Crutchfield shared Ms. Dawson's commitment and accomplishments on behalf of children and families in Wake County and as part of the Wake County Smart Start NC Pre-K Committee. Ms. Dawson's efforts and leadership of her team in the collaboration between Head Start, Wake County Smart Start, and Wake County Public Schools has allowed Wake County to reach and serve as many income-eligible four-year-olds as possible. On behalf of the Committee and staff, Ms. Headen wished Ms. Dawson well. As Ms. Dawson was unable to attend the meeting, Katie Lewis noted she would share the sentiments with Ms. Dawson.

Ms. Coates requested a motion to adopt the agenda. Katherine Williams moved to adopt the agenda. Kerry McCarthy Adams seconded the motion. Calling for a vote and with none opposed, the motion carried. (10-22-11)

Ms. Coates requested a motion to approve minutes from the August 27, 2025, meeting. Veronica Creech moved to approve the minutes of the August 27, 2025, meeting. Ariel Ford seconded the motion. Calling for a vote and hearing no objection, the motion carried. (10-22-12)

**Executive Director's Report**

Executive Director Gayle E. Headen shared a recommendation with the committee for site selection for the next funding cycle, FY2026 – 2029. After discussion, Ms. Coates asked for a motion to approve the WCSS Staff recommendation for site selection, noting the following abstentions: Susan Evans, Jason Horton, Ronetta Pearsall, Cheryl Stallings, Tonya Venable, and Michele Woodson. Kerry McCarthy Adams moved to approve the WCSS Staff recommendation for approval of the following:

- Reopen the North Carolina Pre-Kindergarten (NC Pre-K) Standardized Site Selection Process every 3 years with the next funding cycle being FY 2026-2029
- Timeline and Sub-Committee Members (as detailed on the accompanying chart) for the 2026–2029 FY
- Completion of the NC Pre-K Standardized Site Selection Process electronically through secure grant management software
- Existing NC Pre-K sites that are maintaining compliance and NC Pre-K standards do not have to re-apply during the site selection process
- Determine that high, medium and low-level geographic need will be based on 200% Federal Poverty Level, the number of participating facilities in each zip code, and the number of child applications received

- The local Contractor (WCSS staff members) will support and provide oversight to the Site Selection Sub-Committee as outlined in the NC Pre-K Program Requirements roles and responsibilities (e.g. NC Pre-K application release, application review, application decision tree, and scoring rubric).

Veronica Creech seconded the motion. Hearing no opposition, the motion carried. (10-22-13)

Ms. Headen shared with the Committee that all 1,532 slots were filled across Head Start, Wake County Public Schools, and private sites as of September 22nd and has held. This is the earliest date the NC Pre-K team has achieved full enrollment, and the team was supported in their efforts by other teams across the agency. Ms. Headen noted that filling all seats early ensures as many children as possible are in quality programs as soon as possible, and with that assurance, families can begin to focus on other family priorities. Additionally, the providers know they will be able to maximize their revenue because children are in seats, classrooms are stable, and the providers can focus on making the classroom environment one of an even higher quality. It contributes to a more stabilized early child care system, which is critical at this time. Additionally, filling the seats at the beginning of the school year increases agency spending on children, reducing reversions at the end of the year. Ms. Headen praised Joan Crutchfield, Manager, NC Pre-K, and Carol Orji, Director of Early Childhood Initiatives, for this major accomplishment.

The Pre-K Application Collaborative is now focused on planning for the launch of the FY2026-27 application cycle.

With no further business to discuss, Ms. Coates asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Katherine Williams moved to adjourn the meeting. Matt Glova seconded the motion. Calling for a vote and hearing no objections, the meeting was adjourned by Ms. Coates at 8:57 AM. (10-27-14)

Signed by:

*Matt Ellinwood*

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