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Introducing CandL's 3 priorities

CandL: Care and Learning Coalition <nccf@buildthefoundation.org>

Fri, Sep 19, 2025 at 9:30 AM

Reply-To: "CandL: Care and Learning Coalition" <nccf@reply.buildthefoundation.org>

To: Liz Bell <lbell@ednc.org>



Dear CandL Members,

As we wrap up Phase 4 of the CandL Initiative, we're excited to share the three priorities that will guide our advocacy campaign moving forward. These priorities were chosen by reviewing the data and feedback collected during our Phase 1 listening sessions, ensuring that our work continues to reflect the real needs and voices of families, providers, and communities across North Carolina.

To quickly remind you:

- **Phase 1** – Listening sessions in 34 counties to hear directly from parents, providers, and community members.
- **Phase 2** – Aligning those voices with CandL's vision.
- **Phase 3** – Policy experts reviewed the data and provided recommendations.
- **Phase 4** – Narrowing down the priorities based on community feedback and expert guidance.

Now, as we move into Phase 5, we will officially launch our advocacy campaign around the three chosen priorities. Before we do, we'd love your input. **Please take a few minutes to complete this short Google Form survey to share your feedback on the selected priorities.** Your perspective will help the CandL Leadership Team ensure we are moving forward in a way that reflects the community's vision.

1. Workforce Compensation: The WAGE\$ Salary Supplement Program
The **Child Care WAGE\$® Program** provides salary supplements to low-paid

teachers, directors and family child care educators working with children ages birth to 5 years old. The program is designed to increase retention, support professional development, and improve compensation for early educators. The problem is that the program is underfunded and unequal. Currently, WAGE\$ provides salary supplements in fewer than two thirds of NC counties. Even where it exists, the supplement amounts vary widely-- many counties provide very low salary supplements, while others offer none at all. Because participation is left up to each county, choose not to implement WAGE\$ at all.

This inconsistency undermines the program's ability to retain high-quality educators across the state. Without sufficient supplements, many child care providers cannot earn a living wage. Educators are forced to leave the classroom for jobs in warehouses or fast food, simply to pay their bills and care for their own families. Child care wages remain low because parents cannot afford the true cost of care. To stay open, center owners keep wages low—pitting affordability for families against fair pay for educators.

The Impact:

- **On Families:** Without stable providers, families cannot rely on consistent, high-quality care for their children.
- **On Providers:** Educators struggle to provide for their own families and are forced out of a profession they love.
- **On Centers:** Programs cannot remain open without qualified providers.
- **On the State:** North Carolina's early childhood system remains fragile and inequitable when educator pay is not addressed.

The state government plays a critical role.

The Primary Ask: To build a stable, equitable, and high-quality early childhood system, North Carolina must:

- **fully fund the WAGE\$ program;**
- **mandate implementation in every county; and**
- **distribute supplements equitably across the state, based on the true cost of providing quality care and education.**

2. Alternative Market Rate: A Subsidy Floor and Consistent Rate

In North Carolina, child care subsidies are based on market rates (the amount that programs charge parents reflecting what they believe families in the area can afford). The state sets subsidy rates at 75% of market rates for each of NC's 100 counties. This creates over **3,000 different subsidy rates across the state**, based on factors such as age group, star-rating, and location.

None of these subsidy rates cover the real cost of providing quality childcare for any child. Subsidy rates vary widely across counties and centers. Imagine one provider is \$10 subsidy per child, while another receives just \$2, even though the cost of care is the same. Because rates are so low and unpredictable, many providers refuse to accept subsidies at all.

The Impact:

- **On Families:** Working families who rely on subsidies are left with very few child care options.
- **On Providers:** Programs that do accept subsidies cannot afford to pay their staff fair wages or benefits.
- **On System Stability:** This leads to the loss of providers altogether, deepening the child care crisis in communities across the state.

North Carolina must establish a statewide Alternative Market Rate (AMR) floor for child care subsidies that:

- Ensures consistency across all 100 counties.
- Reflects the true cost of providing high-quality care and education.
- Creates a system that supports both affordability for families and sustainable wages for providers.

Priority Ask: Advocate for a statewide Alternative Market Rate floor that guarantees every child care subsidy reflects the actual cost of quality care, no matter where families live.

3. Family, Friend and Neighbor Care: Support and Resources

Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) care and licensed child care (home- or center-based) are different forms of early care and education. Both play important roles in meeting family needs. FFN care is often chosen because it reflects families' cultural practices, aligns with nontraditional work schedules, and provides trusted, familiar environments. Licensed care offers structured programs that meet state standards for health, safety, and early learning. Both are valid, valuable choices for families. Children thrive in many different settings, and all types of care need resources, but not the same resources.

In North Carolina, only 3 out of 10 children are in licensed centers. The majority are cared for by family, friends, and neighbors. Licensed providers already struggle with inadequate resources, subsidies, and wage supports. FFN providers receive even less. FFN providers often lack access to educational opportunities, health and safety training, and development resources that could strengthen their role as quality caregivers. Other states are further ahead in recognizing and resourcing FFN care. North Carolina risks falling behind if we do not address this gap.

The Impact:

- **On Families:** Without support for FFN providers, families may lack safe, culturally relevant, and high-quality options that align with their lives.
- **On Providers:** FFN caregivers, many of whom are unpaid or underpaid, are left without the resources they need to grow as professionals or sustain their care.
- **On System Stability:** When FFN care is invisible and unsupported, the entire child care system remains fragile and inequitable.

North Carolina must invest in all types of providers, not pit them against each other for scarce resources. This means:

- **Assessing** the unique needs of FFN providers and examining effective models for supporting them;
- **Removing barriers** that prevent FFN providers from participating in the childcare system; and
- **Resourcing** coordinated workforce development that includes FFN caregivers, giving them access to training, resources, and recognition.

Priority Ask: Build a child care system that values both licensed and FFN providers by ensuring all caregivers have access to the resources they need to support young children and families.

Introducing the CandL Website (candlcoalition.org)

Dates for the QRIS Community Meetings

Please share! Pathways to the Stars Community Meetings



The Division of Child Development and Early Education will be hosting community meetings to provide an update on the modernization of North Carolina's Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS) which began in February 2023. Meetings will be held at the following four locations across the state from 6:30pm – 7:30pm.

- 9/23/25 – Charlotte – Leaf Spring School at Matthews – [3420 Pleasant Plains Road Stallings, NC 28104](#)
- 9/25/25 – Morganton - Foothills Higher Education Center, [2128 S Sterling Street](#),

[Morganton, NC, 28655](#)

· 9/29/25 – Greenville - Pitt County Agriculture Center – Auditorium – [403](#)

[Government Circle, Greenville, NC 27834](#)

· 10/1/25 – Raleigh – Wake County Smart Start – [4901 Waters Edge Drive #101, Raleigh NC 27606](#)

Please share this information with families and other early childhood stakeholders in your community and encourage them to learn more about NC's QRIS "Pathways to the Stars, Where Quality and Choice Meet".

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