STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

FY 2023/24 – FY 2026/27

Wake County Smart Start (WCSS)

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FY 2023/24 – FY 2026/27

WAKE COUNTY

Smart Start

About the Strategic Framework

This document outlines the WCSS' Strategic Framework for Fiscal Years 2023/24 to 2026/27.* This framework documents the objectives and strategies that will enable WCSS's transition to program operations that are rooted in racially equitable practice, family engagement and leadership, and data-informed decision-making. This transition disrupts WCSS's standard process with the goal of dismantling existing structures that are upholding a status quo that marginalizes families.

Within the framework, WCSS identified goals, objectives, and strategies that will allow our agency to affect meaningful change in our community through ambitious new initiatives and the refinement of existing practices. Year 1 will focus on planning and development, in which WCSS and its partners will engage families and communities in the co-development of desired outcomes that will measure success. The focus of Years 2-4 will be implementation and activities that center continuous quality improvement.

The strategic framework is a living document that will be iteratively reviewed and revised to reflect the activities and outcomes that the Wake County community considers responsive and relevant to their needs. Each year, WCSS will develop an action plan with transparent steps, structured to capture measurable progress, based on learnings from the prior year.

Working Definitions of key terms are provided at the end of the document.

To read the definitions, please click on the relevant hyperlinks in the text.

* Programs that become funded partners in FY24-27 will work on Year 1 strategies first before implementation.

Abbreviations

B-5 – Birth to Five

CQI – Continuous Quality Improvement

FCC – Family Child Care

FTE – Full Time Employee

FY – Fiscal Year

NCPC – North Carolina Partnership for Children

PCE – Program Coordination and Evaluation

TA – Technical Assistance

QE – Quality Enhancement
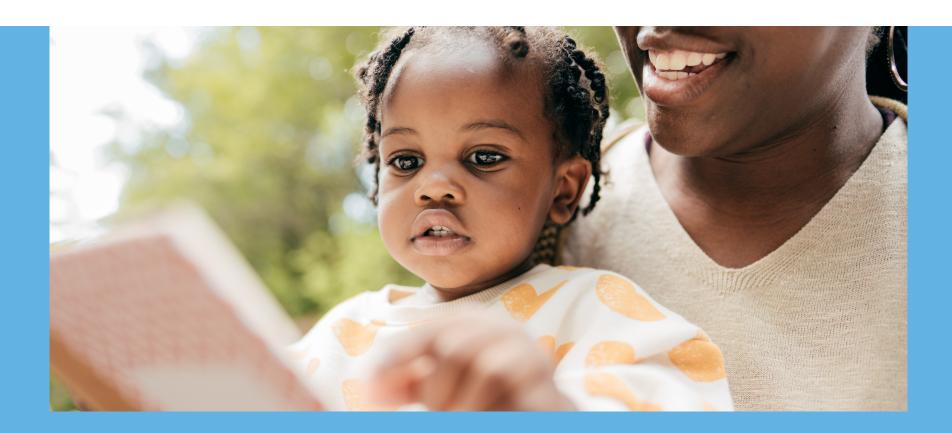
QRIS – Quality Rating and Improvement System

WCSS – Wake County Smart Start

VISION

Children and families who are being marginalized have equitable access to affordable and culturally affirming early childhood programs and services that lay the foundation for a happy and healthy life in which Wake County's children realize their full potential.

MISSION

WCSS partners with families and early childhood organizations to build and sustain access to affordable and culturally affirming programs and services through equitable funding mechanisms and collaborative capacity building efforts in Wake County's communities.

CORE VALUES

Respect

We honor the unique experiences, needs, and strengths of each young child and family and acknowledge our responsibility to provide culturally affirming care, resources, and supports.

Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity

We value diversity, promote inclusive practices, and advance racial, ethnic, and economic equity. We work to eliminate disparities based on race, ethnicity, and economic status.

Advocacy

We provide a strong, united voice for children and families that are being marginalized in Wake County communities.

Responsiveness

We respond to the individual needs of children and families through strengths-based, culturally affirming care and racially equitable practices.

Community Collaboration

We view ourselves as partners with Wake County's communities and build authentic relationships characterized by honesty, integrity, and compassion. We value, elevate, and act upon the voices of our families as leaders in our communities.

Innovation

We value flexibility, actively seek new approaches in practice, and regard challenges as opportunities for growth. We recognize the unique creativity, knowledge, and strengths of our families and partners and work collaboratively to find innovative solutions to community challenges.

Transparency and Accountability

We value our role as public stewards through the use of best business practices, strong internal controls, and accurate documentation of our efforts. We hold ourselves accountable to our families and partners through transparent program operations and data-informed decision-making.

SYSTEM GOAL

Children and Families are supported by a strong, diverse, connected, and integrated early childhood system that promotes results.

LEVEL (AGENCY/ PARTNER)	STRATEGIES	FY 23/24 ACTIVITIES	FYS 24/27 ACTIVITIES	MEASURES (OUTPUTS & OUTCOMES)
Objective: Strengthen family engagement and leadership opportunities ➢ *Year 1: Agency + Partners have a clear and shared understanding of how to engage families and how to share leadership* ➢ *Years 2-4: Agency + Partners integrate family leadership into their agency/program operations**				
Agency	Include families in determining desired programs/services and results (outputs & outcomes)	• Create and share clear guidance on family engagement and leadership plans (composition, roles, engagement strategies) • Revise partner budget line items and contract descriptions to support family compensation	• Provide guidance and implementation support • Collect data on impact of implementation support	• Revised RFP Guidance • Revised funding options and additional line items • Agency organization chart includes FTEs to support family leadership
Partner/ Agency		• Develop family engagement/ leadership plan • Develop timeline for integrating family engagement and leadership in program planning and delivery	• Implement Family Engagement Leadership Plan • Collect and analyze data on family engagement	• Family Engagement Leadership Plan (updated annually) • Lessons learned captured in required quarterly reporting • Revised org chart includes family leadership

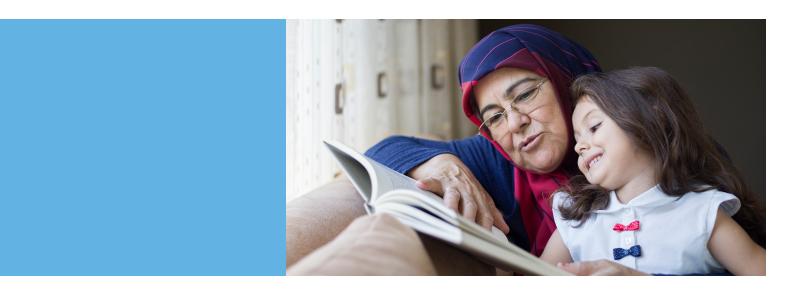| LEVEL (AGENCY/ PARTNER)	STRATEGIES	FY 23/24 ACTIVITIES	FYS 24/27 ACTIVITIES	MEASURES (OUTPUTS & OUTCOMES)
Objective: Increase cross-program/agency collaboration to support efficient and effective services ➢ *Year 1: Agency + Partners have a clear understanding of collaborative work and resource sharing* ➢ *Years 2-4: Partners build collaboration and resource sharing into their program operations*				
Agency	• Develop communities of practice among funded partners • Develop the capacity of partners to work collaboratively	• Elevate focus on collaboration within PCE department tasks • PCE to investigate ongoing collaborative efforts, think through opportunities to enhance transparency and power sharing • Increase PCE budget to support this work, as needed	• PCE leads implementation of collaboration plans • Collect partner data on effectiveness of collaboration	• Collaboration plan/ MOUs (updated annually, based on evaluation data) • Collaborations embedded in RFP • # of collaborative meetings • # of partners implementing new/revised practice based on collaborative effort • # of partners participating in community of practice
Partner/ Agency		• Facilitate development of collaboration plans with partners, including a mutual agreement on power sharing	• Implement communities of practice and collaboration plans • Collect partner data on effectiveness of collaboration	

LEVEL (AGENCY/ PARTNER)	STRATEGIES	FY 23/24 ACTIVITIES	FYS 24/27 ACTIVITIES	MEASURES (OUTPUTS & OUTCOMES)
Objective: Increase the use of data for decision-making and continuous program improvement (CQI) ➢ *Year 1: Agency and partners have a clear and shared understanding of the data needed for decision-making* ➢ *Years 2-4: Agency and partners build data collection and CQI into their operations*				
Agency	Build capacity of partners to identify data sources, collect data, and use data analysis to inform decisions about program and service improvement	• Conduct comprehensive data gap analysis with partners and families • Create and share clear guidance on data collection plan that includes partner feedback and community needs • Adapt current data sources as needed • Identify new data sources • as needed • Revisit/revise guidance on data collection requirements • Develop community-driven outcome measures through participatory research project	• Provide guidance and data collection support • Facilitate capacity-building efforts through technical assistance (TA) and connecting with community partners with data expertise • Evaluate capacity-building TA support • Develop new data sources and tools as needed	• Completed data gap analysis (repeat every Strategic Plan cycle) • Data collection plan requirement embedded in RFP • Completion of community-driven outcome measures • # of TA offerings and participants • TA evaluation results • # of new data sources
Partner/ Agency		• Develop data collection plan (inclusive of required NCPC elements) that includes partner feedback and community needs	• Implement data collection plan • Analyze data and make decisions about program and service improvement	• Data collection plan (updated annually) • Annual report of program/service data and planned revisions

LEVEL (AGENCY/ PARTNER)	STRATEGIES	FY 23/24 ACTIVITIES	FYS 24/27 ACTIVITIES	MEASURES (OUTPUTS & OUTCOMES)
**Objective: Advancing Racial Equity** ➢ Year 1: Agency develops new & flexible funding opportunities for providers who are from and serve communities that are being marginalized ➢ Years 2-4: Agency implements new & flexible funding opportunities to increase opportunities for providers who are from and who serve communities that are being marginalized ➢ Agency + Partners have a clear and shared understanding of how to advance racial equity
Agency	• Offer more flexible funding opportunities/cycles and streamlined application protocols • Fund programs and services in communities/of providers for families that have been marginalized • Ease the burden of the application process	• Conduct outreach to potential partners from Black, Latinx, and Indigenous communities and invite applications • Provide TA to support the development of funding application • Review and re-design application process	• Roll out new funding opportunities • Measure changes in funding to providers/partners supporting marginalized families/communities	• # of newly established funding opportunities • # of program and service providers from communities that have been marginalized
Agency	• Advocate at NCPC and state levels to remove barriers to racial equity practice based on funding processes, definitions, and requirements	• Leverage WCSS Executive Director on Equity committees • Plan advocacy approach	• Extend advocacy work	• Planned revisions to funding allocation, definitions, and requirements at NCPC and state levels
Partner/ Agency	• Engage in racial equity capacity building	• Assess capacity and needs for racial equity work among partners (and those not yet partners)	• Determine supports WCSS can provide to partners • Develop guidance on racial equity • Facilitate partner capacity to create their own racial equity paths	• Revised RFP Guidance • Revised funding options and additional line items

LEVEL (AGENCY/ PARTNER)	STRATEGIES	FY 23/24 ACTIVITIES	FYS 24/27 ACTIVITIES	MEASURES (OUTPUTS & OUTCOMES)
Objective: Creating a trusted framework to work with community organizations ➤ *Year 1: Stronger connections, common vision and shared priorities among agencies, county level policy makers and funders* ➤ *serving children B-5* ➤ *Years 2-4: Improved efficiency and effectiveness of services among agencies serving children B-5*				
Agency	• Develop continuum of care – to include B-5 • Build network to cover scope of needed services by linking to other services and funders • Develop stronger connections and partnerships with grassroot community organizations throughout the county	• Further develop Wake Connections to support case management function • Research additional case management databases and services • Develop coordination strategies to create linkages between services and strengthen shared understanding among funders	• Increase centralized case management services to strengthen ties to basic services, (e.g., housing) • Support transitions between services (e.g., Pre-K to Kindergarten) • Adapt existing systems to support case management (e.g., Wake Connections and NC Cares 360) • Pilot new/revised coordination and linkage strategies	• Identification of additional case management tools/ services • Developed transition plan templates • # of agencies providing case management • Reported satisfaction from families that benefitted from case management

* Programs that become funded partners in FY24-27 will work on Year 1 strategies first before implementation.

GOAL AREA #1 (Child-focused)
Children are healthy and developmentally ready for school.

LEVEL (AGENCY/ PARTNER)	STRATEGIES	FY 23/24 ACTIVITIES	FYS 24/27 ACTIVITIES	MEASURES (OUTPUTS & OUTCOMES)
Objective: Increase children's access to and use of services focused on health and development that are based in culturally affirming and racially equitable practices ➢ *Year 1: Increase children's use of resources that support children's health and development* ➢ *Years 2-4: Improve children's health or development*				
Agency/Partner	• Provide culturally affirming care and services focused on health and development	• Work with caregivers/ providers to define culturally affirming services focused on health and development • Commission review of evidence-based culturally affirming services • Develop plan to shift to culturally affirming services	• Pilot culturally affirming services • Evaluate implementation and effectiveness of culturally affirming services	• Implemented pilot(s) • Improved child health • Improved developmental readiness • Revised service delivery based on continuous quality improvement (CQI)

GOAL AREA #2 (Family-focused)

Children are in safe, supportive home environments.

LEVEL (AGENCY/ PARTNER)	STRATEGIES	FY 23/24 ACTIVITIES	FYS 24/27 ACTIVITIES	MEASURES (OUTPUTS & OUTCOMES)
Objective: Increase families' access to and use of programs and services supporting the family/ home environment that are based in culturally affirming and racially equitable practices ➢ Year 1: Agency + Partners have a clear and shared understanding of culturally-affirming care and services ➢ Years 2-4: Agency + Partners integrate culturally affirming care into their agency/program operations				
Agency	• Maintain and increase mental health/SEL supports	• Work with partners and community organizations to identify opportunities to expand services • Work with community organizations to further capture need, barriers to access for services • Develop funding stream for community health workers to take on additional roles	• Identify training and available resources • Provide training to build services • Convene community organizations and policymakers to advocate for additional mental health services • Evaluate outcomes of training and advocacy work	• Increased capacity of partners and community organizations • # of additional mental health support services • CQI action plan based on evaluation
Agency/Partner	• Provide culturally affirming programs & services supporting the family/ home environment	• Work with families/ parents to define culturally affirming programs and services • Determine family needs and wishes around parenting knowledge and practices • Commission review of evidence-based culturally affirming programs and services • Develop transition plan to shift to culturally affirming programs and services	• Implement transition plan • Evaluate process of transition and assess effectiveness of culturally affirming services	• Transition plan • Improved family knowledge and practices on parenting within a culturally affirming model • CQI action plan based on evaluation

GOAL AREA #3 (Early Care & Education-focused)

Children are in high-quality care that contributes to positive child outcomes.

LEVEL (AGENCY/ PARTNER)	STRATEGIES	FY 23/24 ACTIVITIES	FYS 24/27 ACTIVITIES	MEASURES (OUTPUTS & OUTCOMES)
**Objective: Increase families' access to and use of child care programs and services that are based in culturally affirming and racially equitable practices** ➢ *Year 1: Develop 3-year plan to build child care supply in underserved areas, for target communities, and of home-based & Family Child Care providers* ➢ *Years 2-4: Increase the number of child care facilities that develop and sustain high-quality care over time in underserved areas, for target communities, of home-based & FCC providers*				
Agency	• Access- Build child care supply where families are (in communities), based on established need	• Conduct county-wide assessment of child care availability • Conduct assessment of availability of home-care/ FCC • Develop advocacy plan to systematically build supply in underserved areas	• Implement supply building • Enhance supports to FCC/ home-based-providers • Develop growth plan for increasing access to culturally affirming, high-quality early childhood programs/child care (e.g., Wake ThreeSchool or other programs that serve children 0-5)	• Completed county-wide ECE assessment • Completed plan to address child care deserts • Enhanced priority categories for site selection for 1) underserved areas of 2) target communities
Agency/Partner	• Awareness - Increase awareness of available program/service options	• With partners and families, develop strategy and plan to use existing "parent network" to reach new families (use social media or google)	• Implement strategies • Roll out and track reach and effectiveness	• Increased access to early childhood programs • Access/awareness strategy • and plan • Access/awareness strategy • and plan • Increased awareness and enrollment in programs and services • CQI action plan based on evaluation

LEVEL (AGENCY/ PARTNER)	STRATEGIES	FY 23/24 ACTIVITIES	FYS 24/27 ACTIVITIES	MEASURES (OUTPUTS & OUTCOMES)
Agency/Partner	• Provider Support - Support child care and early childhood programs to implement culturally affirming, high-quality care	• With programs and families develop definition of high-quality and examples of what that looks like for families • Assess the use of culturally affirming curricula • Assess knowledge of culturally affirming practices and racial equity of programs and providers • Develop a plan to support programs to develop and implement culturally affirming curricula and equity training	• Implement plan and strategies • Identify training and technical assistance • Provide training programs and providers • Develop Community of Practice (COP) around racial equity and culturally affirming curricula and practices in programs • Evaluate process and outcomes of training and services	• Completed county-wide ECE assessment • Completed plan to address child care deserts • Enhanced priority categories for site selection for 1) underserved areas of 2) target communities
Agency	• Quality- Increase/maintain quality for center and home-based/ FCC providers	• Adapt existing QRIS standards to incorporate strategic priorities and community-driven outcomes	• Adapt quality enhancement initiatives • Increase reach of funding tied to quality ratings • Continue TA/coaching to increase/maintain quality standards • Evaluate process and outcomes of enhanced QE initiatives	• Increased access to early childhood programs • Access/awareness strategy and plan • Access/awareness strategy and plan • Increased awareness and enrollment in programs and services • CQI action plan based on evaluation
Agency	• Responsiveness- Emergency funds to programs/services	• Develop short-term emergency funding opportunities	• Roll out emergency funds	• # of providers that maintain program operations at standard level

WORKING DEFINITIONS

Racial equity

What is it?

- Process of eliminating racial disparities
- Outcomes are not predicted by your race

How do we achieve it?

- Through an action-focused process
- Through the distribution of resources to those who have been disadvantaged based on race
- Through the identification of privileges/advantages for white families and working to confer the same privileges to families of color
- Through the distribution of resources to those who have been disadvantaged based on race
- Through the identification of privileges/advantages for white families and working to confer the same privileges to families of color

Family engagement and leadership

What is it?

- Power is shared between families, teachers, and administrators
- Families, teachers, and administrators have a shared understanding
- Recognizes families as children's first and most important teachers
- Centers families in decision-making
- Is culturally defined

How do we achieve it?

- Families are equal partners and active participants in goals and decisions about their child's well-being, development, and learning (https://ncchildcare.ncdhhs.gov/Portals/0/documents/pdf/F/FEandL_Framework.pdf?ver=2020-10-28-142947-087)
- Families and caregivers influence decisions and take part in implementing actions, collecting, and analyzing data, and strategic planning
- E.g., parent advisory or parent committee
- Decision-making intentionally includes all cultural backgrounds
- Providers value parents as partners; they listen to families' concerns and act on them

Data-informed decision-making

What is it?

- Data tells the stories of our familiesData provides the "real picture of needs"
- Data is quantitative and qualitative: it includes "experiences" and "metrics/numbers"
- Analysis of our data provides actionable knowledge to guide our decisions
- Data can help us allocate resources and plan services
- Data can help us understand if our programs and services meet needs

How do we achieve it?

- Learn/know what outcomes are meaningful to families
- Community-participatory research

WORKING DEFINITIONS

High-quality child care

What is it?

- Diversity of providers at site
- Culturally affirming curricula
- "Standards" go beyond what the state is looking for
- Quality is defined by the family
- Quality includes access (transportation) and non-traditional hours

How do we achieve it?

- Through the implementation of evidence-based culturally affirming curricula (Use of evidence-based practices and curricula (e.g., Head Start's Curriculum Consumer Report: Reviews and Ratings of Comprehensive Curricula)
- Through the implementation of practices rooted in family culture
- Through increasing accessibility
- Through the hiring of diverse providers who must be adequately compensated for their ability to provide culturally affirming care

Culturally affirming

[care, programs and services]

What is it?

- Different cultural backgrounds are assets to care and learning
- Strengths-based approach to caregiving and teaching
- Rooted in respect and appreciation for the role of culture in children's learning and development
- Supports the continued development of children's home or tribal languages by authentically incorporating them into the learning environment ("linguistic affirmation")

How do we achieve it?

- Programs and services center the knowledge of traditionally marginalized communities
- Programs and services incorporate families' cultural identities and lived experiences
- Use of practices that support the learning, development, and engagement of children from diverse linguistic backgrounds
- Use of evidence-based practices and curricula (e.g., Head Start's Curriculum Consumer Report: Reviews and Ratings of Comprehensive Curricula)

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