



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Wake County Smart Start Hosts Evening Fundraiser Celebrating 25 Years of Making a Difference in the Lives of Young Children, with Celebrity Keynote Sonia Manzano, Maria from Sesame Street.**

**Raleigh, NC** - Wake County Smart Start, the leading early education agency in Wake County, will host Building Bright Futures, an evening fundraiser, for the public on May 13, 2023, at The Raleigh Convention Center. The event celebrates 25 years of shared work in the community preparing young children for success in school and life.

A ticket to the fundraiser includes dinner, raffle, play & learn stations and a keynote by Sonia Manzano, Maria on Sesame Street for 44 years and Lifetime Achievement Emmy Award winner. Proceeds will help Wake County Smart Start administer free Pre-K programs for children living in poverty, improve the quality of child care centers, and support parent education and home visiting services.

Last fiscal year Wake County Smart Start reached over 40,000 children – at home, in school and in their communities – to inspire a long-lasting love of learning. Research shows that investing in early childhood lifts children out of poverty, creates a pipeline for a well-trained workforce, reduces future societal costs, and delivers on the dream that every parent has for their child- a dream of a bright future!

“It’s one of the smartest investments you can make in your community”, says Gayle Headen, Wake County Smart Start Executive Director. “It’s upwards of a 13% return when you invest in early education programs.” When working parents and caregivers can’t access high-quality child care and family support, businesses lose revenue – an estimated \$507 million in annual losses for NC businesses. When communities support affordable child

care and services for young children, they help parents succeed in their careers and prepare children for school and life ahead.

Donald Thompson, CEO of The Diversity Movement, is the event chair. "I am proudly hosting this event because now more than ever, we must champion early childhood services to build a bright future for Wake County. Learning starts early and so should our investment in children's futures."

Building Bright Futures will take place 6pm-9pm Saturday, May 13, at the Raleigh Convention Center, 500 S. Salisbury St., Raleigh, NC 27601. Tickets can be purchased at [www.givebutter.com/brightfutures](http://www.givebutter.com/brightfutures), including a pay-what-you-can option.

[Wake County Smart Start](#) works to ensure that children, birth to five, are prepared for success in school and in life. Follow [this video link](#) to an overview of Wake County Smart Start. For our most recent 2021-2022 Annual Report visit [here](#).