



WATAUGA COUNTY CHILDCARE STUDY: OVERVIEW



The Watauga Economic Development Commission serves as a guide to growth in Watauga County encouraging the creation of new jobs, retaining existing jobs, and promoting a balanced, stable, and vital local economy. Access to quality, affordable childcare can be a barrier to workers entering and staying in the labor force. To better understand this factor, a study was conducted to assess the existing childcare infrastructure and its impact on the people and businesses throughout the county. The Watauga County Childcare Study is an effort of the Watauga Economic Development Commission and Boone Area Chamber of Commerce partnering with the Children's Council of Watauga County and financial support from the Watauga County Board of Commissioners along with Blue Ridge Energy and Appalachian Commercial Real Estate.

WATAUGA COUNTY DEMOGRAPHICS & LABOR FORCE



54,736

Population 2022

10%

Population > 15 years 2022

9,000

New residents in a year (in-migration only) 2022

\$85,689

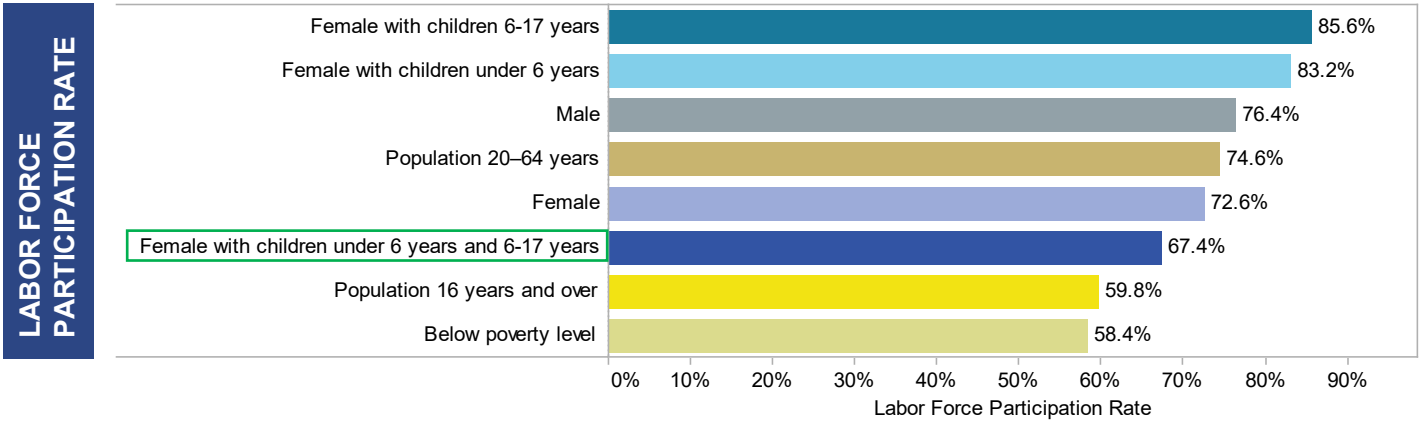
Median Family Income 2022

29,969

Labor Force 2023

10,516

In-Commuters 2021



WATAUGA COUNTY DEMOGRAPHICS & LABOR FORCE



27,664

Watauga County Employment 2023

20%

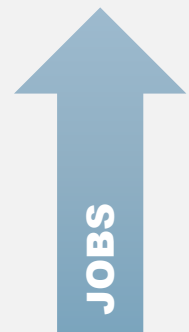
of Total Employment is Leisure & Hospitality 2023

1,252

5-Year Job Growth Total for all Sectors

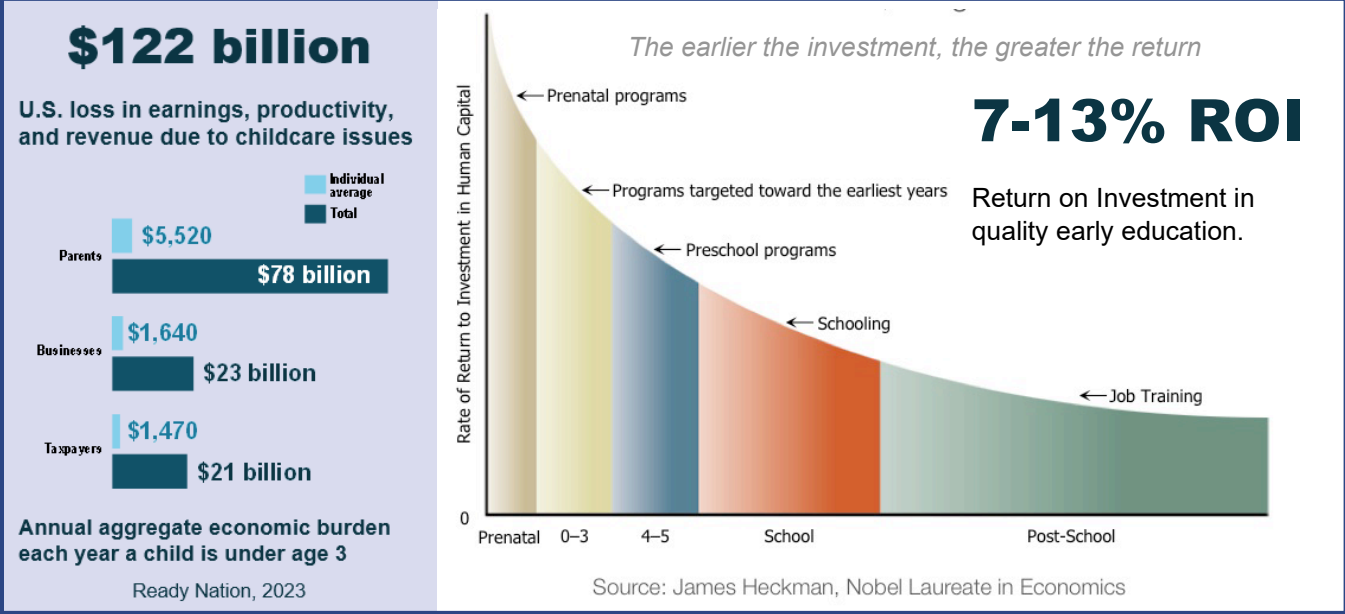
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New Jobs in Healthcare & Social Assistance (Top Sector for 5-Year Growth)



WHY WATAUGA COUNTY MUST INVEST IN QUALITY CHILDCARE

Right now, parents, businesses, and taxpayers are impacted by the lack of sufficient quality childcare choices. Study after study shows that investments in early childcare deliver a significant return on investment for educational and health outcomes that impact long-term economic well-being. Not only does the investment improve the children’s life outcomes, but it also builds a workforce for the future to improve the community and its prospects for positive economic development and wealth-building for all citizens.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Online job ads in Watauga County

1,600

Potential to add parents to the labor force

300

Source: JobsEQ, March 2024. Represent found online ads active within the last thirty days in the area.

Source: U. S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2022 (5-Year Average). Retrieved from datacensus.gov. Calculations of potential workers based on census data and Gallup poll preferences of parents for working or staying home with children.

WATAUGA COUNTY CHILDCARE



6,600

Children Under 18 Years Living with their families

2,000

Population Children Birth- 5 Years

4,600

Children Age 6-17 Years

34

Licensed Childcare Operations

913

Enrollment in Licensed Childcare/Pre-K

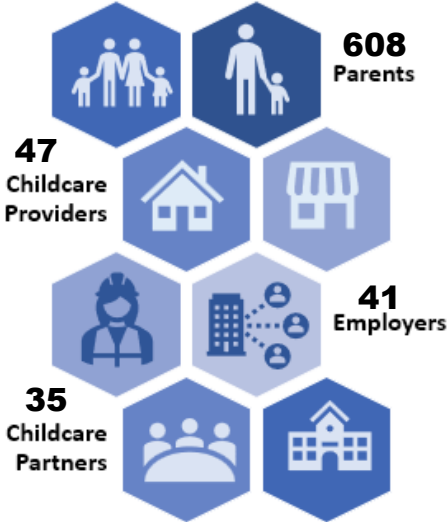
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5-Star Operations (highest quality)



Childcare options in Watauga County include licensed centers and family child care homes; family, friends, and neighbors (FFN); half-day programs; NC Pre-K; Head Start; nanny/sitter; and drop-in care.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT



I put my child on all available waiting lists for childcare when I was 8 weeks pregnant. I did not get into a full-time childcare situation until my child was 15 months old. When my maternity leave ended, we had to put her in a half-day program, leave work, pick her up, and [put her in different care]...it was an incredible stressor on my mental health as a new mother.

- survey participant

Afterschool is as bad as daycare if not worse.

- business survey participant

We desperately need more snow day/teacher work day/holiday/after school and sick care

- survey participant

FINDINGS: GAPS IN QUALITY CHILDCARE

There are not enough quality childcare options for children from birth to 5 years in Watauga County. There is a gap of 579 seats in licensed care.¹



There are not enough quality after-school and other out-of-school programs in Watauga County. There is a gap in after-school spots for children.²



There is an opportunity to reengage parents of young children who are not in the labor force.³



Childcare teachers are paid low salaries and often do not have employer benefits after obtaining training or a degree in early education. This has led to workers leaving the profession and fueling staffing shortages in the childcare field.



Childcare providers are in business for the children and operate on narrow profit margins. This makes it difficult to raise pay for workers without raising the cost to parents.



Parents in Watauga County struggle to afford childcare. Not all can get subsidies and people are leaving the labor force and possibly making decisions to limit family size.

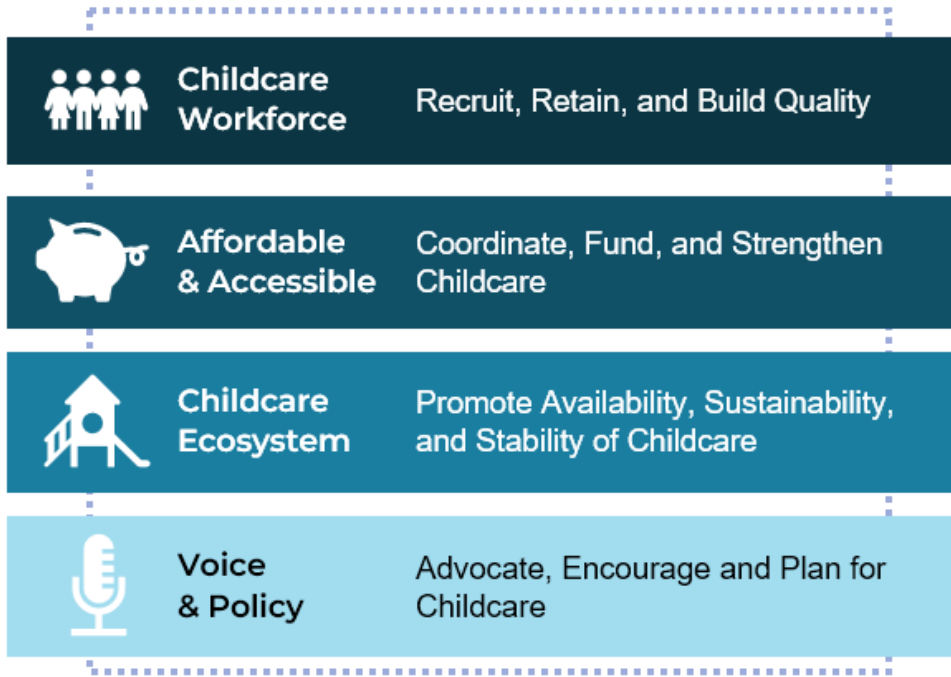


¹ Model of seats based on children of all parents working and local survey on percentage of parents preferring licensed or formal program settings for their children birth to 5 years.

² Model of seats based on children enrolled in elementary and middle school outside the home and local survey on percentage of parents preferring licensed or formal program settings for their school age children.

³ This estimate is calculated by number of parents not in the workforce and modeled on the percentage of parents who prefer to work based on a 2019 Gallup poll.

PILLARS FOR BUILDING A QUALITY CHILDCARE ECOSYSTEM RECOMMENDATIONS



Pillar 1	Pillar 2	Pillar 3	Pillar 4
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinated early childhood career pathway Watauga early childhood scholarship(s) Apprenticeship and creative service-learning opportunities Develop a salary scale guide Establish a purchasing consortium Create a teacher's supply warehouse Free childcare for childcare workers Workforce incentives 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinate and strengthen public-private partnerships Blended funding sources Public-private funding Early childhood education fund 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> After-school care for NC Pre-K children. Innovative, alternative childcare centers. Encourage expansion (home-based care) Identify childcare provider(s) to partner and expand childcare Second shift as well as sick childcare partnerships Create a substitute pool for childcare Leverage technology 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Create a business and childcare collaborative to specifically develop state legislative priorities Promote expansion of family eligibility for childcare benefits. Encourage family-friendly businesses through Family Forward NC Infrastructure development to include childcare in planning

