



united agenda for
CHILDREN

Every Child: Safe, Healthy and Well-Educated



Speak out for children
at a town hall meeting

town meeting
Participant Guide

Saturday
December 11, 2004

8:00 am - 4:00 pm
Charlotte Merchandise Mart
Charlotte, NC

well-educated safe healthy children

United Agenda Community Chairs

Shirley Fulton, former Superior Court Judge

Jim Woodward, Chancellor of UNC Charlotte

Barb Pellin, former Assistant Superintendent of Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools & Community Volunteer

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Mecklenburg County Area Mental
Health Authority

Mecklenburg County Health
Department

Mecklenburg County Department of
Social Services

Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Office

Public Library of Charlotte &

Mecklenburg County

POST (Partners in Out-of-School Time)

Smart Start of Mecklenburg County

Teen Health Connection

Thompson Children's Home

Time Out Youth

UNC Charlotte

United Family Services

Wachovia

Winners PLUS Agency

YMCA of Greater Charlotte

Youth Homes, Inc.

The United Agenda for Children town meeting utilizes the AmericaSpeaks 21st Century Town Meeting® model and is organized under the auspices of The Lee Institute. The Lee Institute is a non-profit organization whose mission is to build collaborative leadership capacity throughout the greater Charlotte region to solve varied community issues. AmericaSpeaks is a non-profit organization founded in 1995 to explore and develop new and innovative mechanisms to link citizen voices to governance.

welcome

United Agenda Coalition Partners

Thank you for being here today. As you participate in the United Agenda town hall meeting, you will have a chance to speak out on the issues facing the children of Mecklenburg County. We will work to create a set of priorities to make sure every child in our community is healthy, safe and well-educated.

More than 1,000 of your neighbors are gathered here today. We are parents, grandparents, friends of young people or young people ourselves. We are from the city and the suburbs. We represent a wide variety of cultures and experiences. Some of us are advocates for children, experts in the fields of health, safety or education or elected officials. While we have many differences, we share a common commitment to the children of our community. Together, we can and will help to shape the future for children in Mecklenburg County.

Today you will:

- Learn more about our community's children – who they are, the lives they lead, and the conditions in which they live, learn, play and grow.
- Hear viewpoints and perspectives from fellow residents who are from different races, ethnicities, parts of town and economic, social and political backgrounds.
- Share values, beliefs and ideas with fellow residents who care about children and the community.
- Create the beginnings of a common, prioritized agenda for addressing critical issues that affect our children's health, safety and education.

You are giving the children of Mecklenburg County a great gift today with your investment of time, energy and ideas. On their behalf, thank you.



United Agenda for Children is an unprecedented coalition of citizens, civic leaders, businesses, government, and community agencies who have united to ensure a positive future for all of the children – from birth to 21 – of Mecklenburg County. The goal of the United Agenda for Children is working together, over the next three years, to create and begin implementing a united action plan that will ensure all children in Mecklenburg County are healthy, safe and well-educated.

why we need
your help today

An Investment in Our Future

Why do this? Mecklenburg County is one of the fastest growing areas of the country, with strong civic pride, a solid economic climate, and a high degree of volunteer and non-profit commitment. The county is home to over 200,000 children, from birth to 21. We share a common goal that all children in Mecklenburg County should be healthy, safe and well-educated. How we get there is not as easy as knowing where we want to go. We have no lack of opinions in our community as to what we should be doing, and a strong economic investment in numerous programs and approaches. Yet, different perspectives, philosophies, and concerns can lead to a lack of public will, collaboration or even inaction. The United Agenda for Children initiative is designed to help our community:

- **Create an opportunity** for in-depth, honest conversation based on facts to develop our priorities and what we might do together to address them.
- **Understand that we must all be part of the solution** for children in our community.
- **Reduce the 'us vs. them' stances** that keep us from making sure all children are healthy, safe and well-educated.
- **Improve coordination and create a vision shared** by government, non-profits, businesses, the faith community, families, and civic leaders to help to reduce possible duplication of gaps in services.

A united agenda for children will focus the resources, talents and energetic will of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg community on the most important needs of children and youth. Today we take the first step to create that type of united agenda.

A diverse range of leaders in our community, including elected officials, government staff, non-profit staff and board members, and business and philanthropic leaders, have agreed to listen carefully to the recommendations that emerge from this day. Many of them are here as participants; some are here as guests. All are here to ensure that the information from this day will inform future policy and practice.



What will you do today?

This is an interactive event designed to bring diverse people, voices and viewpoints together around real, substantive and effective ideas for children in our community.

Each person here today represents, and is drawn from, the diversity of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg community. You will have an easy-to-use voting keypad, and the help of a trained volunteer facilitator to guide your discussions. By the end of the day, a preliminary report will be available for everyone that reflects the priorities that we set together.

This guide is organized with information in four sections: an introduction to the day, and then a section each about the health, safety and education of our children. This is your guide to use, so feel free to make notes in it as the discussion progresses. At the end of the day, please take this guide with you to share with family, friends, colleagues and neighbors who could not join us.

What Will Happen After the Town Hall?

The public part of the United Agenda for Children is launched by today's town hall meeting. In 2005, the recommendations and priorities you helped to develop will inform the county and school budget processes and begin to be acted on by implementation teams as well as connected back to ongoing work in our community. These teams will be made up of people representing many different public organizations, governments and parts of our community. At the end of today's meeting, we invite you to consider how you wish to stay involved. In 2006, these implementation teams will continue their work, and the community will be re-engaged to assess the progress of the United Agenda. Throughout this process, the community will receive regular reports on findings and outcomes as the work on behalf of children continues.

At the end of this three-year process, our community will have quantifiably improved the lives of children and youth in Charlotte-Mecklenburg. We will be better educated about the welfare of our children. And, we will have established a way to work towards a shared vision and action plan to make sure that every child is healthy, safe and well-educated.



your role in the
town meeting

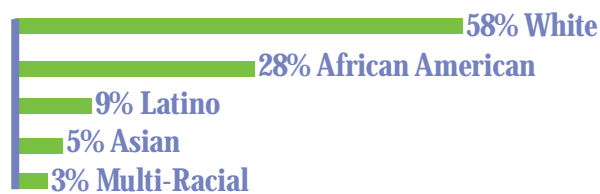
a look at the community, people and children of Charlotte-Mecklenburg



Our County: Key Facts About Charlotte-Mecklenburg

- Charlotte-Mecklenburg is home to approximately 769,000 people. For the last decade, the county's population has grown 36%.¹

Residents of Mecklenburg County²

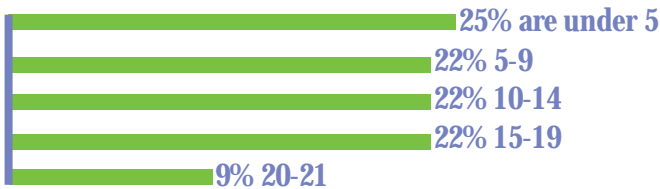


- Approximately 11% of Mecklenburg County's population was born outside of the United States. Of those born outside the U.S., 69% entered the country in the past fifteen years.³
- In Mecklenburg County, 86% of adults over 25 are high school graduates and 37% have a bachelor's degree or higher.⁴
- The median household income in the county is \$48,156, which is higher than the United States median household income of \$43,564.⁵
- 9% of families are below the poverty line, which is currently defined as an income level of \$18,600 or less for a family of four, consisting of two adults and two children. This rate is roughly the same as state and federal levels.⁶
- Charlotte-Mecklenburg is home to 9 universities and colleges. In addition, more than 150,000 students are enrolled in degree or college-transfer programs at the 35 colleges, universities, community colleges and technical institutes located within the 13 county Charlotte Metro Region.⁷

our children and youth: facts about young people in Charlotte-Mecklenbrug

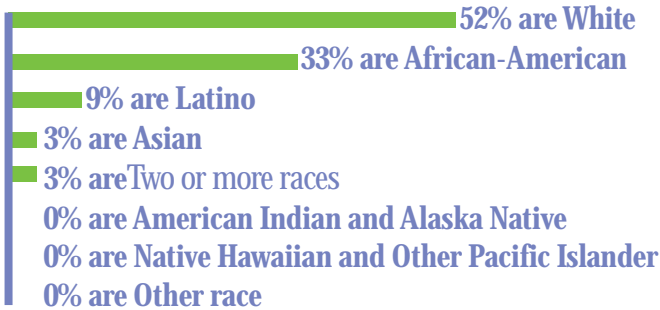
- There are approximately 225,000 children under the age of 18 in Mecklenburg County, which represents one out of every 4 residents.

Age Distribution of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Youth



- Just over half of children in the county are white and one third are African American. Nine percent of children are Latino and 3% are Asian. Children identifying themselves as Latino and multi-racial are the fastest growing groups in terms of race and ethnicity.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Children by Race and Ethnicity⁸



- 80 languages are spoken by children in the public school system.⁹
- One out of six students in Mecklenburg County attends a private or home school. In 2003-04, there were 54,501 students being home schooled in North Carolina.¹⁰
- 35% of households have children under the age of 18 living with them.¹¹
- 66,000 children under the age of 18 are receiving some form of public assistance, including food stamps, TANF (Work First), and/or medical assistance. This number represents one third of all children under 18 in the county.¹²
- 58% of all children under 6 in Mecklenburg County live in families in which all parents present are working; 70% of all children between the ages of 7-18 live in families in which all parents present are working.¹³
- As of November 2004, 6,082 children were on the waiting list for child care subsidies in Mecklenburg County.¹⁴
- At the present time, 22% of entering 9th graders dropout prior to graduating from the public schools.¹⁵
- 88% of students finishing public schools continue their education.¹⁶



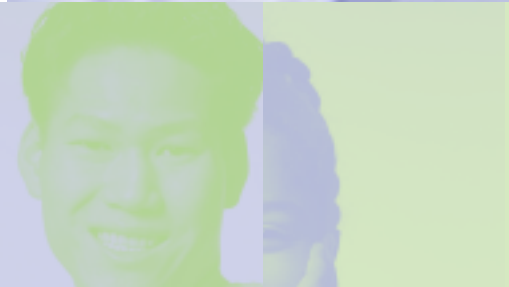
putting our money where our children are:



The Funding of Health, Safety, and Education in Our Community

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg community invests a tremendous amount of resources in our children and youth. The primary sources of funds include the federal, state and local governments, foundations, non-profits, businesses and individuals.

Although the total amount invested in children is not available, a quick overview of major areas of funding indicates the depth and breadth of resources already available to our community.



Our County

Mecklenburg County's budget for the next fiscal year will be almost \$775 million with 87% of it coming from local sources, 7% from the federal government and 5.6% coming from state government. These funds are divided among four major categories: (1) community health and safety, (2) effective and efficient government, (3) social, education and economic opportunity, and (4) growth management and environment.

Mecklenburg County Spending, 2004



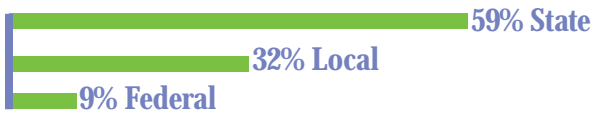
Within these categories, the County appropriates a significant portion of funds for children and youth, including:

- \$344 million for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools
- \$17 million for services related to child abuse and neglect
- \$6 million for child illness prevention and treatment
- \$11 million for community violence prevention and protection
- \$2 million for domestic violence protection and prevention
- \$13 million for parks and fields

Our Schools

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools receive funding from federal and state governments, local government and non-profit and private sources.

Sources of Funding, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools



The total operating budget for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools for 2004-2005 is \$889 million, which includes \$862 million for sustaining operations, \$22 million for growth and \$5 million for new initiatives and expansions.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, 2004-2005 Expenditures



Our City Government

The City of Charlotte has an operating budget of \$773 million with capital spending of \$780 million. Included in this spending are salaries and benefits for police, fire, neighborhood development and transportation staff—all areas which contribute to the overall well-being of children and youth in the community.

The Foundation and Non-Profit Sector

A broad spectrum of non-profit agencies throughout Charlotte-Mecklenburg support children and youth in the community with financial resources and countless volunteer hours. While it is not possible to quantify all the resources being directed towards children and youth in the community, we do know that in 2004:

- The United Way of the Central Carolinas supported 36 organizations and initiatives with grants totaling in excess of \$6 million.
- The Duke Endowment gave grants of just over \$1.6 million for children's issues.
- The Foundation for the Carolinas distributed over \$20 million in grants to support initiatives and organizations related education, youth, human services and health in the Central Carolinas region.
- The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation supported the well-being of families and children with grants of over \$1.5 million since early 2003.
- Smart Start of Mecklenburg County distributed \$20 million in our community toward a variety of children and family programs, with 82% of that funding being spent to improve the quality and availability of child care.

a starting point for discussion

Beginning a discussion as complex as the health, safety and education of all children in Mecklenburg County requires a starting point. In looking for such a place, the United Agenda coalition decided to use an already existing framework called “Core Values for Children and Families.” These eight values have been endorsed by a diverse set of local institutions, including the county, the public schools, the police department, and the Children’s Alliance. The Core Values answer the question: *What are the basic conditions that children need in order to be healthy, safe and well-educated members of the community?*

Today’s Town Hall Meeting will focus primarily upon the core values associated with health, safety and education. Each Core Value consists of three parts: 1) the core value itself, 2) an overall statement of what we wish for children in the county, and 3) a list of specific areas of focus.

where did the core values come from?

The Core Values were developed based on an independent assessment of community needs and generated through three sources. First, other comparable national and international studies were reviewed via documents and the Internet. Second, a series of six focus groups were convened of parents, school-aged children, and stakeholders. Third, a statistically valid, random survey of 600 people was conducted that represented every geographic area of Mecklenburg County.

The Core Values were produced through a two-year study led by the Council for Children with participation by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, the United Way, the Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services, the Charlotte Mecklenburg Police Department, the Mecklenburg County Area Mental Health Child and Adolescent Services, the Charlotte Housing Authority, The Youth Homes, Inc., and The Relatives, Inc.

ALL children in Mecklenburg County have a right to expect that:

1 FAMILY SUPPORT

They will have adults who will provide them with affection, a positive role model and concern for their present and future needs.

Parent Involvement in Education

Family Stability

Quality Foster Care and Adoptions Programs

Parenting Skills

Communication Between Parent and Child

Adult Role Models



2 EDUCATION

They will have opportunities, from birth to adulthood, for free and appropriate education.

Quality Early Childhood Programs

Quality Teachers

Appropriate Classroom Experiences ¹⁷

Adequate Facilities and Equipment

Dropout Prevention

Programs to Address Special Needs



3 HEALTH CARE

They will not suffer needlessly or be constrained by a lack of health care.

Obtaining Necessary Immunizations

Access to and Use of Affordable Health Care ¹⁸

Appropriate Dental/Vision/Hearing Care ¹⁹

Quality Mental Health Programs

Healthy Behavior ²⁰

4 SAFETY

They will feel safe at home, in their neighborhoods and in their schools; the justice system will protect and advocate for them.

Safe Learning Environment

Neighborhood Safety

Reduction in Domestic Violence

Reduction in Child Abuse and Neglect

Effective Juvenile Justice System

Advocacy/Legal Protection

5 EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

They will have opportunities to develop emotional strength.

Positive Guidance from Adults

Opportunities for Diverse Experiences

Moral Development

Opportunities to Experience Success

Spiritual Development

Positive Peer Interaction

6 ECONOMIC SECURITY

They will have sufficient food, shelter and clothing for their needs, and the adults in their lives will support them.

Having Basic Needs Met

Parental Access to Livable Wage Jobs

Affordable Housing

Child Support Enforcement

Career Development for Teens



7 COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

They will have places to go and things to do that involve them in their community.

Parks and Recreational Facilities

Out-of-School Time Programs

Organized Athletics

Arts and Cultural Activities

Organized Youth Programs



8 COMMUNITY SUPPORT

They will be the priority of the entire community.

Human Service Agency Programs for Families

Elected Officials' Emphasis on Children's Needs

Accessible Transportation

Comprehensive Available Resource Information

Business Support/Family Friendly Workplaces

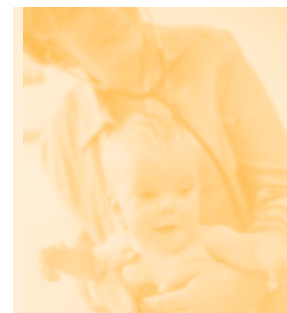
Public Awareness of Children's Issues

a word on the information in this guide

The following pages offer basic information about the current condition of children and youth in Mecklenburg County in the areas of health, safety and education. In compiling this information, the United Agenda Content Committee attempted to balance the need to provide adequate information for the public to understand the conditions facing young people, while limiting the guide to a manageable size.

All data included in this guide was required to (1) come from a reliable source, (2) be easy to understand, and (3) be based on credible research. Local data was used whenever possible. If no local data was available, then state or national data was provided for context.

core value 1 ► health care



Core Value - Health Care

“Our children and youth will not suffer needlessly or be constrained by a lack of health care”

From birth to 21, a child’s health can impact emotional, physical, and academic development. Healthier children tend to be more successful in all aspects of their lives and become more productive and healthier adults. How do you raise a healthy child? Recognized positive influences on children’s lives include: loving parents and adults, good nutrition beginning before birth, easy access to recreational opportunities, prevention of common childhood injuries, screening and treatment of health issues, and adequate access to appropriate and ongoing health care.

In their earliest years, the greatest health care issues for young children tend to be preventative care, screening for early detection of health problems, and injury prevention. With school age children health care concerns which may become apparent include access to affordable health coverage, provision of appropriate dental, vision and hearing care, identification of mental health issues and support for children with special needs. Health habits are formed early, so encouragement of healthy behaviors is important from infancy onwards. However, for adolescents, the adoption of healthy behaviors becomes a significant priority, as well as the support of good mental health.

Key health care standards that support the Core Value are:

- **Obtaining Necessary Immunizations**
- **Access to and Use of Affordable Health Care**
- **Appropriate Dental, Vision and Hearing Care**
- **Quality Mental Health Programs**
- **Healthy Behavior**

What We Know About Immunization

- **Immunizations** against preventable childhood diseases, especially in very young children, **are important to maintaining good health.**
- Almost all children in the county receive at least some of their required immunization shots. **Complete immunization**, however, **requires more than 20 shots before a child is two years old**, with additional shots needed before entering school. Information is not available about what percentage of two-year olds receives all of their immunizations.
- The public schools report that approximately **28% of school-aged children are not sufficiently immunized** or cannot find proper documentation at the time they begin kindergarten.²¹

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- **Immunizations are available free of charge** to all children from the Mecklenburg County Health Department and are also available from pediatricians or family practice physicians at low cost.

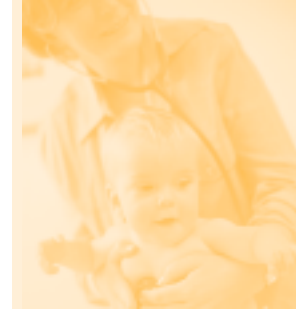
What We Know About Access to and Use of Affordable Health Care

- Health costs increased nationally by 11% in 2004. **Charlotte had an increase of 17%, the 4th highest in the country.**²²
- Very little local data exists on children's actual use of available primary care. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children have 8 health care visits in their first year, 3 in their second year, and one a year through adolescence.²³
- Almost 4 in 10 North Carolina high school students reported not having seen a health care provider for a check-up, or well exam during the past year.²⁴
- In Mecklenburg County, estimates are that **11-12% of children under 18 are uninsured.**²⁵ Children who don't have health insurance are less likely to receive important medical treatment to prevent problems from occurring and to detect them before they become dangerous.
- Health coverage is available for most young children in the community through two public programs, Medicaid and North Carolina Health Choice, which provide **coverage for almost 60,000 children** from low-income families in the county.²⁶ Some children remain without coverage because their family's income falls outside eligibility requirements or because of a lack of access to or awareness of available programs, or due to undocumented status of the family.
- School nurses can identify health problems, make referrals for available services or work with families to obtain care. The national recommendation for nurse to pupil ratio is 1 to 750. **In Mecklenburg County, the ratio is 1 to 2,200.**²⁷
- Last year, school nurses reported **2,839 referrals** for diabetes, asthma, injury, psycho/social behavior and illness, with an **86% success rate** in securing care.²⁸

What We Know About Appropriate Dental, Vision and Hearing Care

- In each of the last nine years, screening by public dental hygienists identified **dental decay in 10% to 14% of kindergartners in the public schools.** For the 2003-2004 school year, students in schools in less affluent neighborhoods showed decay **rates as high as 25%**, while students in **more affluent areas** had untreated decay rates of only **2%.**²⁹
- **Tooth decay is one of the most common chronic infectious diseases for children** in the United States. Nationally, **school absenteeism** due to both decay and other dental problems **is estimated at 52 million hours each year.**³⁰

core value 1 ► health care



- **Almost 4 in 10** North Carolina high school students **reported not having seen a dentist** during the past year.³¹
- Just over **1%** of children under the age of 18 **had trouble receiving care for eye problems**, according to a 2003 survey of community health needs. Just over 4% of young people between the ages of 18 and 20 were identified as having problems receiving care for a vision problem.³²
- The Mecklenburg County Health Department staff screened **43,000 students last year for vision problems**. More than **2,200 students received glasses or other vision care**.³³
- The survey of community health needs also found that **unmet hearing needs** were reported for less than **1% of children** across all age groups except for 15 to 17 year olds. Just over 2% of 15 to 17 year olds were reported to have unmet hearing needs.³⁴

What We Know About Quality Mental Health Programs

- In 2001, a survey of North Carolina high school students found that **76% of students felt good about themselves**. Over one-third of students said they felt stress in life most or all of the time and almost **15% reported feeling alone in life**.³⁵
- In the same survey, about **18% said they seriously thought about attempting suicide** in the past year, compared to a **national average of 19%**.³⁶
- **17 young people died from suicide** in Mecklenburg County between the years of **1998 and 2003**.³⁷
- Over the past three years, the number of children who received services from the Mental Health Authority **increased from 7,280 to 7,596**.³⁸
- The Mental Health Authority estimates that **15% of children** in Mecklenburg County **have a serious emotional disturbance or a moderate to severe developmental disability**, based on a statistical model. Of these children, the Mental Health Authority estimates that **60% are not receiving treatment**.³⁹

What We Know About Healthy Behavior

- Obese and overweight children are at an increased risk of developing type two diabetes, elevated blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease and low self-esteem.⁴⁰ **About 12%** of North Carolina children **are reported to be overweight compared to a national average of 14%**.⁴¹
- In North Carolina, **10% of high school students reported no vigorous or moderate physical activity** during the past week.⁴²

- Following a national trend, teen pregnancy rates in Mecklenburg County have ***been steadily declining in recent years***. In Mecklenburg County in 2003, teens 12-19 represented 9% of total Mecklenburg pregnancies (1,558 young women).⁴³
- ***52%*** of North Carolina high school students reported ***having had sexual intercourse*** last year, and ***38% of students who had sex said they did not use a condom*** the last time they had sexual intercourse.⁴⁴ Among teens in 2002, there were ***701*** reported cases of ***gonorrhea***, ***1,341*** reported cases of ***chlamydia***, and ***19 cases of HIV or AIDS***.⁴⁵
- In the 2002 Student Drug Survey, ***18.7% of 10th graders*** in the county's public school system, ***reported current use*** during the past 30 days ***of cigarettes, 31.6% current use of alcohol, and 21.5% current use of marijuana***.⁴⁶

Health Care and the Core Values

Consider how the other seven Core Values may affect your priorities for health care and for healthy children.

Family Support

Education

Safety

Emotional Well Being

Economic Security

Community Activities

Community Support

It is clear that the Core Values are connected to each other and to our goal of ensuring the health of our young people.

For example, where a child lives is usually connected to a family's economic security. Access to community activities provides positive options for children and youth. Family support is key to teaching values, citizenship, and morals.

core value 2 ► safety



Core Value - Safety

“They will feel safe at home, in their neighborhoods and in their schools; the justice system will protect and advocate for them.”

From birth to 21, safety at home, at school, and in the community, is critical to a child’s well-being. We have a shared responsibility for the safety of our children. The home is the place where parents can help children learn to make good personal decisions in regard to their own safety and the safety of others. The community, through education and prevention, can reinforce and support these efforts.

The safety of our youngest children is most affected by their home environment and may be threatened by domestic violence or child abuse. As children grow older, the threat of crime and violence outside of the home creates a potentially significant issue in school and in the community. In this sense, protecting young people requires not only that they are safe but, also, that they “feel safe.” It also means addressing how best to support young people who are dealing with the juvenile justice system.

Key safety standards that support the Core Values are:

- ***Safe Learning Environment***
- ***Neighborhood Safety***
- ***Reduction in Domestic Violence***
- ***Reduction in Child Abuse and Neglect***
- ***Effective Juvenile Justice System***
- ***Advocacy/Legal Protection***

What We Know About a Safe Learning Environment

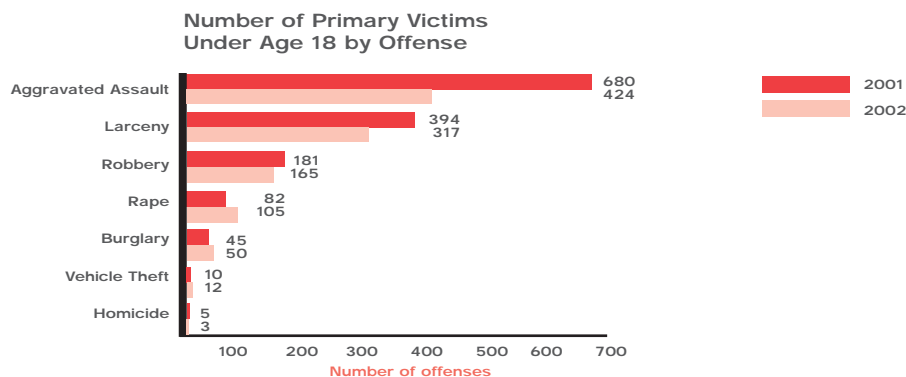
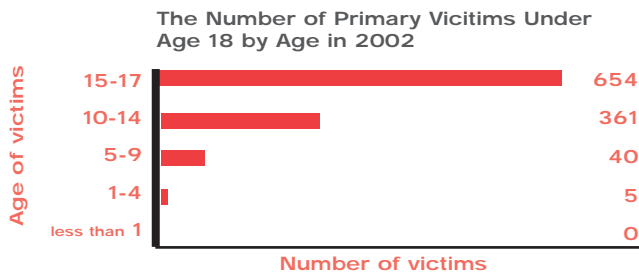
- In the county’s public schools, there were about 4.7 acts of crime or violence for every 1,000 students last year, compared to ***7.4 acts for every 1,000 students across North Carolina***. Over the last two years, the rate in Charlotte Mecklenburg was ***significantly lower*** than it was in the previous six years.⁴⁷
- The ***five highest reported offenses*** committed in the county’s public schools last year were ***possession of a weapon (283), possession of a controlled substance (160), assault on school personnel (29), possession of alcoholic beverage (24), and possession of a firearm (21)***.⁴⁸

next page

- There were no reported incidents of more serious offenses in the county's public schools last year.⁴⁹
- **70% of students said they feel safe at school** and **90% of parents** said their child was safe at school, according to a survey conducted by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools.⁵⁰

What We Know About Neighborhood Safety

- A review of the types of crimes committed against youth under the age of 18 shows that **aggravated assault and larceny are the most common types** of crimes, **both of which declined between 2001 and 2002**. These offenses are followed by robbery, rape, burglary, vehicle theft and homicide.⁵¹
- The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department formed a **Gang Intelligence Unit** in the summer of 2003. Little reliable information is available about youth gangs in the county. The county has had a youth curfew ordinance since 1995.
- The **peak times for juvenile arrests** occur in the middle of the day, from about **10 a.m. to 4 p.m.**⁵²
- Nationally, **children are twice as likely as an adult to be a victim of a violent crime** and **three times as likely to be a victim of simple assault.**⁵³
- **654 youth** between the ages of **15 and 17 were victims of violent crime in 2002**. Among youth between the ages of 10 and 14, 361 were victims of violent crime. 45 young people under the age of 10 were victims.⁵⁴



core value 2 ► safety



What We Know About Domestic Violence

- Very little reliable information is available about domestic violence in Mecklenburg County, although many local experts believe it is widely underreported and the available data is limited.
- According to national studies, **children who witness domestic violence are more likely to exhibit a wide range of problems including depression, anxiety, and violence.** They are more likely to engage in the following behaviors: attempted suicide, abuse of drugs and alcohol, and run away from home.⁵⁵
- According to national studies, in homes where partner abuse occurs, **children are 1,500 times more likely to be abused.**⁵⁶

What We Know About Child Abuse

- **More than 11,000 investigations of neglect, abuse or drug dependency** were performed for children in Mecklenburg last year. These investigations confirmed that **1,566 children were victims** of neglect, abuse or drug dependency. More than **2,700** additional children **were referred** to some form of support services.⁵⁷
- **Child abuse is difficult to measure** because abusive behavior often goes unreported and no estimate is available of unreported cases. The Charlotte Mecklenburg Child Development Community Policing Program works within 4 of the 12 police districts, and provides immediate help to children who have been victims and witnesses to violence.
- A study of these referrals showed that **80% of the reported incidents occurred at home.** 64% of the children referred for immediate support were under the age of nine years old.⁵⁸
- **Most reports** made to Mecklenburg's Child Protective Services **are for child neglect, not abuse.** Abuse is involved in just over 13% of reported cases in the county.⁵⁹

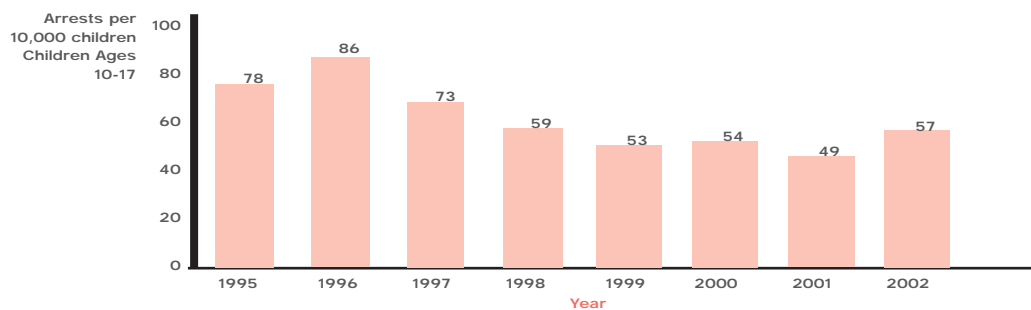
Reports of Child Neglect or Abuse per 1,000 Children



What We Know About the Juvenile Justice System

- **1,948 young people** between the ages of 11 and 17 had *some involvement with the juvenile justice system* in the first nine months of this year in Mecklenburg County. Of these, **1,631 youth committed offenses** that would be considered crimes if they were adults. The remaining youth were reported for running away, truancy, or ungovernable behavior. ⁶⁰
- **990 young people were sent to hearings** for the offenses they committed over this time and **352 were diverted from the court system** to some form of monitoring program. ⁶¹
- **837 youth were admitted to a detention center** in the first nine months of this year. Almost 80% of those admitted to a detention center were African American and 14% were white. **Almost 69% were male.** ⁶²
- Last year, 58% of the young people who were brought before a disposition hearing in North Carolina had a history of serious problems in school. **Thirty-nine percent had a history of substance abuse and 15% were in need of treatment for substance abuse.** Sixty-four percent had no past history with the juvenile justice system. ⁶³
- The **rate of arrest for children and youth for violent crimes declined between 1995 and 2002.** Violent crimes are defined as murder, non-negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery and aggravated assault. ⁶⁴

Juvenile Arrest Rate for Violent Crime
per 10,000 people ages 10-17



What We Know About Advocacy and Legal Protection

- Every young person in the custody of the Department of Social Services has a legal right to an adult advocate who will defend the child's best interest. **Currently, there are 1,095 young people in need of an advocate and 173 volunteers to advocate on their behalf;** 583 children have advocates and **512 are waiting for an advocate** or are being monitored. ⁶⁵
- A 2003 study of the legal services provided for juveniles facing delinquency charges in North Carolina conducted by the American Bar Association found that the **quality of juvenile defense in many areas of the State is deficient.** ⁶⁶

core value 2 ► safety



- The same study found that North Carolina juveniles consistently have representation, but not at sufficiently early stages of their cases, so they are interrogated and often held in custody without seeing a lawyer. **89% of lawyers surveyed reported meeting their clients for the first time at the courthouse on the day of a hearing**⁶⁷
- Further, the study found that there are **insufficient training opportunities** for the state's juvenile defense attorneys and **insufficient standards of practice**.⁶⁸

Safety and the Core Values

Consider how the other seven Core Values may affect your priorities for safety of children and youth.

Family Support

Education

Health

Emotional Well Being

Economic Security

Community Activities

Community Support

It is clear that the Core Values are connected to each other and to our goal of ensuring that all children are safe. For example, a family's economic security may impact the environment in which a child lives. Strong community organizations that serve the needs of children and youth can offer safe alternatives. Parental support and involvement is a strong encouragement for safe choices and behaviors.

core value 3 ▶ education



Core Value - Education

“They will have opportunities, from birth to adulthood, for free and appropriate education.”

From birth to 21, education provides young people with the tools they need in order to grow into productive, healthy, and active adults. The ages of birth to 5 are perhaps the most significant years for establishing a strong emotional, physical and cognitive basis for later years.⁶⁹ Quality education in homes, child care centers and preschools has been well documented in supporting a child’s development.⁷⁰ Additionally, at each level, a child’s educational achievement is influenced by a complex interaction of the quality of the teaching, classroom experience, instructional leadership, and availability and quality of facilities and equipment.

A high school diploma is critical to the future success of adults across several areas including economic security, crime prevention, social and emotional well-being and family health.

The world our children will face as adults has become increasingly complex. It is now estimated that people entering the workplace will hold anywhere from 10-15 jobs in their lifetimes. The jobs of the future will demand a strong base in math and communication skills, flexibility and teamwork, technological knowledge, and higher level thinking skills. In addition, as Americans face a world that is both more dangerous and more competitive, participation in our country’s civic life will be important.

Key education standards that support this Core Value include:

- ***Quality Early Childhood Programs***
- ***Quality Teachers***
- ***Appropriate Classroom Experiences***⁷¹
- ***Adequate Facilities and Equipment***
- ***Dropout Prevention***
- ***Programs to Address Special Needs***

What We Know About Quality Early Childhood Programs

- More than ***57,000 children under the age of 6 have working parents*** in Mecklenburg County. The ***average fee*** for full time child care for an infant in Mecklenburg County ranges ***between \$6,760 and \$8,164***.⁷²
- The ***total capacity*** of licensed child care programs (child care centers & family child care homes) in Mecklenburg County is more than ***45,000 spaces***, however, ***spaces available at 4- and 5-star rated programs number a little over 25,000***.⁷³

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- Every licensed North Carolina child care program **receives a rating of 1 to 5 stars** (see box for explanation of star ratings). In Mecklenburg County, **there are currently 944 licensed** early childhood programs. Of the childcare centers, 41% are rated either 1, 2 or 3 stars; 49% have a rating of 4 or 5. Of the family child care homes, 80% are rated 1, 2, or 3 and 20% are rated 4 or 5.⁷⁴

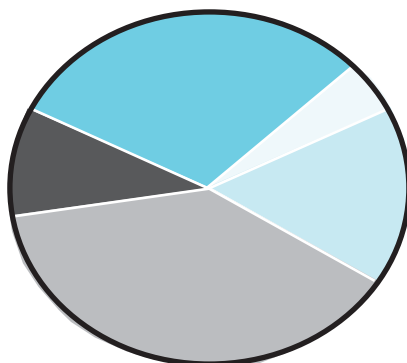
North Carolina's Star-rated Licensing System






North Carolina law requires child care programs with two or more children, operating for more than four hours per day, to have a license. The state uses a range of one to five stars to rate each program. Programs that meet minimum licensing requirements receive one star, while programs exceeding these basic requirements may volunteer to apply to receive up to five stars. Stars are achieved by assessment of a program's environment, its level of staff educational training, and its history of compliance with state regulations.

Some programs are not required to be licensed, including center-based programs operated by churches and programs that operate fewer than four hours a day or seasonally, such as part-day preschools, out-of-school time programs and camps.⁷⁵

- While last year child care subsidies were provided to more than **10,000 children per month** at an annual cost of approximately **\$54 million**, an average of more than **4,000 children remained on the waiting list** for child care subsidies each month.⁷⁶
- The Bright Beginnings preschool program is a literacy based, full-day initiative which focuses on 4 year olds with identified educational needs. Currently, over **4,200 four-year olds participate in Bright Beginnings programs** in 157 CMS classrooms, and in 19 community-based sites (child care centers, part day preschools, and Head Start facilities) funded by Smart Start of Mecklenburg County and the N.C. More at Four initiative.

Households with Children Under Age 6 by Family Configuration and Employment Status Total = 57,563



	Living with two parents (both working)	21,620
	Living with father only (working)	2,356
	Living with mother only (working)	9,190
	Living with two parents (one parent working)	19,898
	Not in labor force	4,499

core value 3 ► education



- Some studies indicate that **students who participated in Bright Beginnings have displayed higher performance** throughout elementary school compared to similar students who did not participate in Bright Beginnings.⁷⁷

What We Know About Appropriate Classroom Experiences

- The strongest research on the impact of class size has been conducted within K-3 classrooms. Project STAR in Tennessee showed that **small classes have an advantage over larger classes in student performance in the early primary grades**. In addition, the **small-class advantage was about twice as large for minority students** than for whites, resulting in a considerably reduced achievement gap.⁷⁸
- Research is mixed on the impact of class size in 3-12 classrooms.⁷⁹
- The average student to teacher ratio in classrooms in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools varies, with an average of **26 students in K-9th grade**, and **29 students in grades 10-12**.⁸⁰
- Many research studies have shown that students from lower income families are at greater risk for academic failure. **The risk factors for individual students can be reduced by extra support and academic assistance to ensure academic success**.⁸¹
- A **high concentration** of low-income students in a school appears to impact academic achievement and has negative effects on students, teachers and the school.⁸²
- **Strong leadership by a school principal** is directly related to higher academic achievement.⁸³

What We Know About Quality Teachers

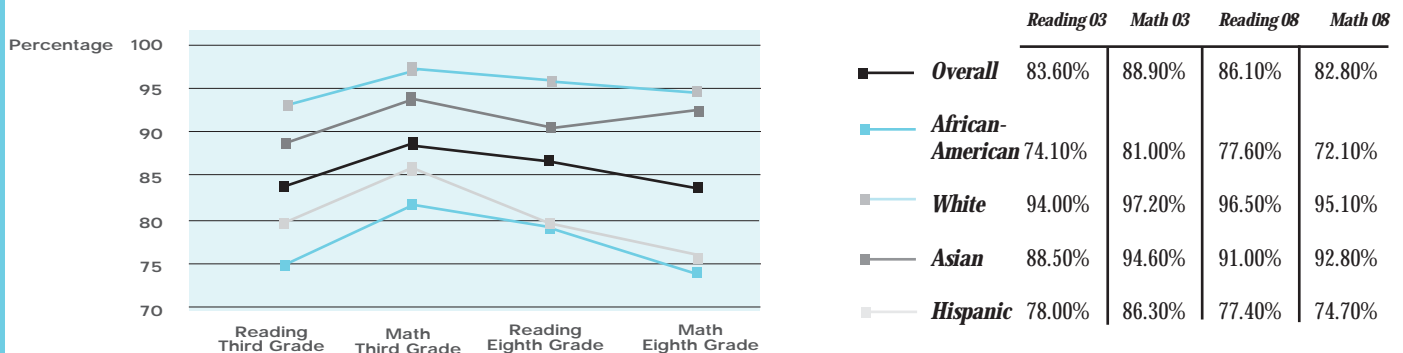
- A broad range of information is available showing that the **quality of teaching in a classroom can be the single most important predictor** of student academic achievement. Level of education, years of experience, professional training and compensation of teachers can all impact the quality of teaching, although there is much discussion in the field about which of these factors is the most significant.
- In early childhood programs, **25% of teachers and teacher assistants have obtained an associate degree** or higher with **only 9%** of these having degrees in the early childhood field; 72% have only a high school diploma.⁸⁴
- The median starting wage for child care center teachers in Mecklenburg County is **\$8 per hour**, and the median highest teacher wage reported was **\$10 per hour in 2003**.⁸⁵
- The average teacher salary in the county's public schools is **\$40,184**.⁸⁶

- The public schools employ more than **7,800 full-time teachers, and over 2,500 of these have advanced degrees.**⁸⁷ In Mecklenburg County there are **60 private and religious schools** with **17,000 students and 1,684 teachers.**⁸⁸ In 2003-04, there were **54,501 students being home schooled** in North Carolina.⁸⁹
- Qualifications of private and home schooled teachers vary.
- The **retention rate** of teachers in the public schools of Mecklenburg County is **84%**, with nearly **one in four teachers in the system have less than one year of experience.**⁹⁰
- Across the state, the number of college and education graduates **is not sufficient** to meet demands of growing districts and recruitment efforts have expanded nationally and internationally.⁹¹

What We Know About Adequate Facilities and Equipment

- National studies show that certain basic elements of school facilities can have a **critical impact** on teaching and learning, **including temperature, lighting, acoustics, a quiet environment and comfort.** Researchers found that students within poor facilities performed 5 – 17% worse than those within standard facilities, even after taking into account socio-economic status.⁹²
- The county’s elementary schools have an **average of 626 students** (North Carolina average is 489), middle schools have an average of **931 students** (North Carolina is 681), and high schools have an average of **1,835 students** (North Carolina is 1,017).⁹³
- Mecklenburg County is **growing at a rate of almost 3% a year** with the southern, northern, northeastern and Lake Wylie areas of the county growing faster than the rest. The center city has seen some increase in residents, but at a much slower rate.⁹⁴

Percentage of Students at or above Grade level for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools



core value 3 ► education



What We Know About Adequate Facilities and Equipment cont'd

- About **one third** of the schools in the US use portable classrooms.⁹⁵
- In 2002-03, CMS has **6,169 classrooms in use; 558 or 9% of those are mobile classrooms**. These mobile classrooms represent the equivalent of **sixteen elementary schools, ten middle schools, or five high schools**.⁹⁶
- The use of mobile classrooms is higher in the areas of high growth.
- To provide the seats needed in elementary, middle and high school grade **by 2012, the district must supply an additional 22,277 seats, including 16,553 elementary, 1756 middle school and 3,968 high school**. To provide these seats, by 2012-13 a district report outlines the need to build **19 new elementary schools, one new middle school (1,200-student capacity) and three new high schools (two at 2,000-student capacity and one at 600-student capacity)**.⁹⁷

What We Know About Drop-Out Prevention

- A variety of strategies **can prevent drop-outs**, including school-community collaboration, safe learning environments, family engagement, early childhood education, early literacy training, mentoring, alternative schooling, out-of-school time, and career and technical education.⁹⁸
- **54% of 9th graders** who enter one of the county's public schools **graduate** from the same school in 4 years. **22% drop out, 21% move to another educational setting, and 4% remain active students**. The drop-out rate for African American students is almost **twice that of white students**. The drop-out rate for males is almost **twice as high as for females**.⁹⁹
- The average **daily attendance** rate across the county's public school system was **93% last year, down from 95% two years ago**. Attendance in school is one primary indicator of academic achievement.¹⁰⁰

What We Know About Addressing Special Needs

- The Charlotte-Mecklenburg School system offers special education programs for children who are **autistic, hearing impaired, mentally disabled, multi-handicapped, orthopaedically impaired, behaviorally/emotionally disabled, speech-language impaired, traumatic brain injured, visually impaired and who have other special needs**.¹⁰¹
- The county's public school system is currently **piloting a program**, which will allow **students to receive special care at their home schools**, rather than going to the specific schools in the district that offer a program for them.

- In 2004, **39% of students with disabilities in grades 3-8 achieved at or above grade level on math and reading standardized tests.** 28% achieved proficiency on the tests.¹⁰²

Life After High School

As young people approach adulthood, some join the workforce while others enter post-secondary education. In both cases, a young person's ability to become a productive member of our community depends on receiving adequate training and resources to develop the skills needed to succeed.

The potential for success in the workforce is greatly improved by a high school diploma. County residents with less than a high school diploma have an unemployment rate twice that of high school graduates and four times higher than college graduates.¹⁰³ **The median income of a four-year college graduate in the Carolinas is 60-65 % higher than the median income of a high school graduate.**¹⁰⁴ Nationally, in 1999, the average annual income of a high school graduate was less than \$25,000; **for someone with a four year college degree, it was nearly \$46,000.**¹⁰⁵

In 2002-2003, approximately 37% of the graduates of public schools attended one of the colleges and universities in the University of North Carolina system and 16% of the graduates attended Central Piedmont Community College.¹⁰⁶

The success of graduates from the county's public high schools within the North Carolina public universities varied widely depending upon which high school they attended. For example, the percentage of students obtaining at least a 2.0 grade point average in their freshmen year during the 2002-03 school year ranged from 51% of graduates from one Mecklenburg County high school to 86% from another.¹⁰⁷

In a 2001 survey by the Charlotte Chamber, employers were asked to estimate the availability of and need for low-skilled, skilled, and professional employees. Respondents said that skilled employees were least available and most needed, while low-skilled employees were perceived to be the most available and the least needed. **Responses indicated that most jobs require a high school diploma or higher level of education today.** In five years respondents estimated that an even larger proportion of the workforce will need training beyond high school.¹⁰⁸

core value 3 ▶ education



Education and the Core Values

Consider how the other seven Core Values may affect your priorities for the education of young people.

Family Support

Health

Safety

Emotional Well Being

Economic Security

Community Activities

Community Support

It is clear that the Core Values are connected to each other and to our goal of ensuring that all children are educated. The involvement and support of parents is the first and foremost influence on a child's educational achievement. Resources offered by a variety of community organizations provide additional support to families and schools. Children being safe, healthy, and economically secure will affect his or her ability to learn at school.

The Importance of Out-of-School Time and Activity to Children and Youth

Children and youth spend **50% more time out of school than in school**. This includes the hours before and after school, school holidays and summer vacation.¹⁰⁹ **22%** of North Carolina's K-12 children and youth **are responsible for taking care of themselves** during time outside of school.¹¹⁰

National studies have shown that children and youth who are involved in a range of activities that allow them to make creative, energetic use of their talents and skills also learn better, are healthier, and are safer. Community activities help connect children and youth with adults and peers to form supportive relationships and opportunities for learning and involvement, key indicators of success as adults.¹¹¹

In North Carolina, **public schools are the largest provider of after school programs. YMCA's, religious organizations, and Boys and Girls Clubs round out the top four providers in the state.**¹¹²

In Mecklenburg County, Partners-in-Out-of-School Time (POST), a collaboration of out-of-school programs works together to coordinate services that are available for youth and children.