

CRAVEN SMART START NEWS

Craven Smart Start Newsletter

Third Issue FY 2021 2022

Working to Reach Important Milestones

Greetings friends. Over the last few months, we have seen more children than we did during the two years of the pandemic. Many of these children were in purple or blue caps and gowns rehearsing and/or celebrating their “graduation” from preschool. Seeing the children and their happy parents and grandparents, we are reminded that they will soon be starting kindergarten, a very important milestone. These are the months when preschool teachers of four or five year olds work hard to ensure their children get a solid foundation for learning. But preschoolers are not the only ones among our community partners to reach an important milestone during these months, as the adult students at Family Literacy also study and test to earn their High School Equivalency Diploma, another important milestone! We applaud these individuals, both young and adult, for their hard work and we recognize the teachers and others who helped them along the way.

The staff of Craven Smart Start also reached a milestone, when we wrapped up another successful year for FY 2021-2022, and started our 24th year of operation with a new Executive Director, Cassandra Bennett. We look forward to working with Cassandra and incorporating her thoughts and ideas into our strategic plan for the year ahead.

In this issue, we introduce you to Cassandra Bennett and provide updates about our Craven Smart Start Board, including the names of new Board Members. It also includes a program feature about one of the programs Smart Start helps to fund, the Subsidized Child Care Assistance Program, with updates about their waiting list policy and the application procedure. As always, we have photos of children and parents from some of our Smart Start-funded activities this time focused on pre-k graduation celebrations and end of year, that took place in our county. Hope you enjoy!

Mission of Craven Smart Start:

Building Brighter Futures for Young Children



Children in the NC Pre-K class at Excel 6 in Havelock were excited to receive their Blue Bags for participating in the Raising A Reader program this year.

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Welcome Cassandra Bennett! Ms. Bennett was selected by the Craven Smart Start Board to fill the position of Executive Director for our Smart Start partnership. She began working in the position on June 20, 2022.

Meet Executive Director Cassandra Bennett

Cassandra Bennett has returned to eastern North Carolina after years of serving in the education field. She has worked as a teacher, counselor and principal in North Carolina, West Virginia, Aruba, Hawaii and Alaska. Cassandra's first job started with Carteret County Schools as a kindergarten teacher in Cape Carteret. She later served the communities of Beaufort, Moore and Hoke counties.

In Alaska she served in administrative roles as, Principal and Superintendent with native American tribes. While in Honolulu, Hawaii, Cassandra worked for the Hawaii Department of Education, serving as an Education Officer for children and families without homes across the seven islands. Also, in Hawaii, she served as the headmaster for preschools governed by Kamehameha Schools. She has been recognized as a district superintendent and principal with experience leading staff, guiding academics, and encouraging student growth. She is adept at implementing effective policies and procedures to positively shape the educational environmental environment. Her experience includes program management with deep knowledge of government education programs and data that follows her abilities for turning around struggling schools, improving school ranking and standardized test scores.

Cassandra has a love for learning indicated with degrees from Atlantic Christian College, East Carolina University, Campbell University and the University of Alaska. She is a credentialed infant specialist with NC-PAIR and was an Active Parenting Instructor with Sandhills Mental Health in Moore County. Her love for reaching the needs of people and completion of counseling and pastoral courses allowed her the honor of serving Moore County Hospital as a volunteer chaplain.

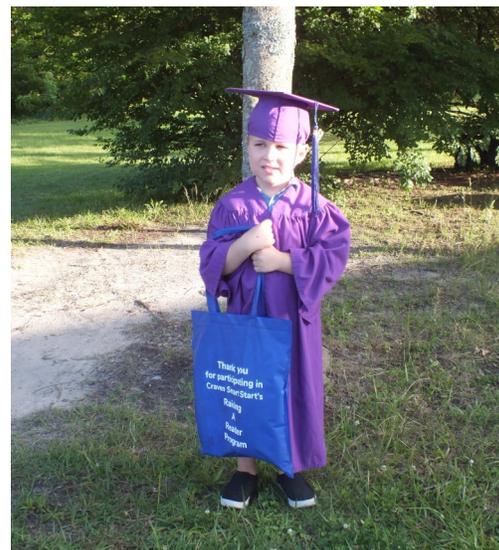
Cassandra hopes to write a book about her Alaskan adventures followed by audible books on Amazon. She has a love for interior decorating, landscaping, art and her two Welsh Pembroke corgi's Amos and Andy. Her two sons live in New Bern and Washington and a daughter in Oklahoma. Her grandparent name is Mimi with one grandson in Washington, 2 in Oklahoma and one on the way.

NC Pre-K Registration for the 2022– 2023 School Year Were On-line and in-Person

Craven County Schools held two in-person Pre-K Registrations this spring. The first one was held on May 6th at the West New Bern Recreation Center, which was a new location. The second in-person registration was held at G. A. Barden Elementary in Havelock.

Families **may still** register online, by using the online application. The Pre-K application may be accessed using the Student Registration button at the bottom of the page at <https://www.cravenk12.org/Page/18238>. The child's birth certificate and proof of family income will need to be uploaded. To be eligible, children must be 4 years old on or before August 31st of the current year and children may have an Individual Education Plan (IEP). For information, visit: <https://www.cravenk12.org/Page/1479>.

Craven Smart Start is proud to provide funds to help support the NC Pre-K program.



A youngster from Excel 1 proudly holds his Raising A Reader Blue Bag filled with books. He will be attending kindergarten in the fall.

2021—2022 Board of Directors

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Pinkie Moore –Community
Outreach Coordinator /Newsletter
Writer/Editor



Board Members, Pat Ipock and Lisa Kemp, enjoy talking with children at the Family Literacy program at J. W. Smith Elementary during their site visit to the Family Literacy campus.

Craven Smart Start Board Update

The Craven Smart Start Board of Directors is pleased to announce that five representatives from the community have been added to the Craven Smart Start Board. The new Board Members include: Jennifer Blackman representing the Craven County Health Department; Angelia Crawley representing Coastal Community Action; Linder Ervin representing Child Care Network; LaTicia Garfield representing Precious Moments Family Child Care Home; and Susan Husson, representing Interfaith Refugee Ministries. These Board Members were approved and seated at the June board meeting.

Craven Smart Start is administered and held accountable by a board of directors, who are listed at left. This board is made up of community members who fill specific community positions. Craven Smart Start Board Members attend monthly board meetings and committee meetings and also participate in a Board Member Orientation session.

Many thanks to our Board Members for their service, support and commitment to the young children and their families in Craven County!

Subsidized Child Care Assistance Program

The Subsidized Child Care Assistance Program is managed by the Day Care Unit of the Craven County Department of Social Services and partly funded by Craven Smart Start (\$518,392 in FY 2021-2022). The program provides income-eligible parents, who work or attend school/training, with assistance in paying for high quality childcare for their children under six years of age.

Currently, Craven DSS **does not** have a waiting list for families who need childcare to support employment. Only families who need childcare to support their education (i.e. college, skills training, etc.) are added to the waiting list at this time, and there are less than 20 families on the waiting list (as of July 11th) for that reason. According to Robyn Scott, the Child Care Coordinator, "Our application process begins with an inquiry screening, which can be done by picking up a form at our front desk or calling 252-636-4900 and asking for daycare intake, and a worker can take the information over the phone. Once we receive this information, if the family screens eligible, they are either added to the waiting list or put on our rotation to be called for an actual application interview".

Craven Smart Start is very proud of our long partnership with the Craven DSS and their management of this program that helps so many income-eligible Craven County parents and their children.

Contact Us

Give us a call for more information or questions about our services and programs.

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Visit us on the web at
www.cravensmartstart.org

Craven Smart Start is a 501(c)3. Donations are tax-deductible.

About photos on page 5.

- **Top Left:** The Family Literacy Program hosted the First Year Celebration of the National Adult Education Honor Society and inducted nine adult Family Literacy students. The 2022 High School Equivalency Diploma Graduates, Elizabeth Romero-Angel and Christopher Hendrix, pictured here, were also recognized.
- **Top Right:** Nadia Lowe, Raising A Reader Coordinator wrapped up Raising A Reader for the year, providing all 114 participants with their year-end Blue Bags. Nadia, with help from "Pete the Cat", handed out blue bags to children in the NC Pre-kindergarten classes at Excel 7 in a drive-through graduation celebration.
- **Bottom Left:** Excel 1 held an early evening outdoor graduation ceremony for their NC Pre-K class with friends and family in attendance. Each child received a Raising A Reader Blue Bag for their participation in the program this year and children shared some STEM facts they learned from activities, supported by the BOSCH Community Foundation grant, that Craven Smart Start received earlier in the year.
- **Bottom Right:** Childcare Network 77 held a traditional preschool graduation ceremony in their play area on Saturday, June 4th. The children entertained families and friends with songs they had learned over the year. Everyone joined in on the preschool favorite "Tooty Ta"...Thumbs Up!

