

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Randolph Partnership for Children Honors Early Childhood Educators at Annual Night of the Stars

Asheboro, N.C. (May 19, 2026) — The Randolph Partnership for Children (RPC) celebrated Randolph County's early childhood educators at its annual Night of the Stars banquet on Tuesday, May 19, 2026, at The Exchange in Asheboro. The event honored early educators in Randolph County's early care and education settings who have earned academic credentials in the past year, recognizing each individual by name in front of their colleagues and peers. This year's keynote speaker was Angela Lewis, Early Care and Education Manager, North Carolina Partnership for Children.

Educators recognized at the 2026 Night of the Stars included:

Early Childhood Credentials

Jenna Bullins

Christy Caruso

Katie Kidd

Mary Trivette

Deja Watts-Ratliff

Early Childhood Education and Early Childhood Administration Certificate

Mari Andrade

Early Childhood Administration Certificate

Hannah Staley

Associate's Degree in Early Childhood Education

Patricia Barajas

Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood Education and Development

Whitney Pope



Beth-Anna Smith (left) and Caris Dettle were the 2026 recipients of the Susan Helsabeck Scholarship for Early Educators.

"Early education is meaningful, powerful work because it touches children at the very beginning of who they are becoming. Early educators plant seeds of confidence, curiosity, safety, language, love, and hope every single day. When they continue pursuing their own education, they are not just earning credentials or completing coursework; they are growing the gifts they already carry so they can pour even more deeply into children, families, and communities. Their learning becomes legacy," said Angela Lewis.



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The evening also celebrated the recipients of the Susan Helsabeck Scholarship for Early Educators, awarded annually by the Randolph Partnership for Children to early childhood educators pursuing coursework in early childhood education or a related field of study. This year's recipients are Beth-Anna Smith of the Early Childhood Development Center, who is attending the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and Caris Dettle of the Randleman Enrichment Center, who is attending Randolph Community College. The scholarship honors the memory of Susan Helsabeck and reflects RPC's commitment to investing in the professional growth of Randolph County's early childhood workforce — because well-educated and supported educators are essential to helping every child in our community thrive.

"The educators being honored tonight have made a remarkable commitment — not just to their own growth, but to every child in their classroom," said Kristy Umfleet, Director of Early Care and Education at RPC. "This is a community that believes in the people who build our children's foundation. We are so proud to celebrate them."

Early educators in Randolph County's early care and education settings who had earned credentials, certification, associate, bachelor's, or master's degree in early childhood education or related coursework and their colleagues were invited to attend Night of the Stars and celebrate.

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About the Randolph Partnership for Children: Since 1999, the Randolph Partnership for Children (RPC), a non-profit organization, has positively impacted the lives of Randolph County's young children. As the community's lead organization for young children and their families, RPC works with and through diverse agencies, individuals, organizations, and communities to ensure all children enter school healthy and ready to succeed in school and life. RPC is a United Way agency. For more information, visit www.randolphkids.org.

About North Carolina Partnership for Children

The North Carolina Partnership for Children, also known as Smart Start, is a private public initiative that works to ensure all North Carolina children from birth to age five are healthy and ready to succeed in school and in life. For more information, visit smartstart.org.

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