

# **Survey of *More at Four* Programs for the 2003 Needs and Resources Assessment**

## Introduction

This report describes the results of a survey, conducted in January 2003, about the operation of the *More at Four* preschool program and challenges faced by the 90 counties participating in the program in the 2002-03 school year. Some of these numbers likely will have changed for the 2003-04 school year, but this report provides reliable information about needs and resources overall.

The *More at Four* program is a community-based, voluntary pre-kindergarten initiative designed to prepare at-risk four-year-olds in North Carolina for success in school. *More at Four* programs are required to provide 6 - 6.5 hours of classroom early education per day for 180 days (10 months) of the year. The State pays approximately \$3,500/child/year for these services and local communities provide contributions for the remaining costs. Some of the program's preschool classrooms are in school buildings; others are in Head Start or community-based early childhood centers. Regardless of location, all meet state-specified standards regarding class size, teacher education, curriculum, and other services.

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the *More at Four* program coordinated with a team from the FPG Child Development Institute at UNC-Chapel Hill to gather information about the needs of and resources for North Carolina's young children. A survey of *More at Four* programs was designed to specifically address the legislative mandate to assess needs and resources regarding four-year-olds in North Carolina. The overall goal of this project is to determine the status of our state's resources in meeting the needs of young children in each county.

Results presented in this report are from a survey conducted in all *More at Four* programs in January 2003, one year after *More at Four* implementation began. The Program Administrator for each county was asked to complete a survey about their *More at Four* program and all of them replied (100% response rate). Ten counties in North Carolina did not participate in the *More at Four* program in 2002-03. Several of those 10 have used the time to plan for future program implementation so that during the 2003-04 school year, at least 98 of North Carolina's 100 counties will provide the *More at Four* program for at-risk four-year-olds in their county. The programs were asked to report on enrollment and services offered during the month of January 2003. They also reported on staffing and operating challenges.

## Enrollment

During January 2003, 4,834 children were participating in the *More at Four* program. This was a considerable increase over the 1,244 children who enrolled in the 2001-02 school year. These 4,834 children were served in 489 classrooms at 388 sites in communities across North Carolina.

As of January 2003, 9,216 children in these 90 counties had applied for the *More at Four* program for the current academic year. Guilford County accounted for 2,133 of the applicants. Guilford County has a single entry system for preschool programs so all parents who apply for preschool for their child are automatically considered to have applied for *More at Four*, although only some are eligible. As of January 2003, 5,575 of the children in NC who had applied for the program were eligible for *More at Four* services for academic year 2002-03. In other words, 60.5% of children whose parents had applied for the program were eligible. In January 2003 there were 791 children on *More at Four* waiting lists.

## Support Services for Children

In addition to the classroom-based component that all *More at Four* programs must provide, some provided additional services with local resources. For example, many sites (54%) had before and/or after school services available for *More at Four* children and close to half of the sites (49%) had sources of funds other than parent fees available to children in *More at Four* to help pay for before and/or after school services. Approximately 17% received financial assistance for before and/or after school services (from a source other than *More at Four*).

Forty-six percent (46%) of the sites provided extended year services, that is, classes in the summer. Forty percent had sources of funds other than parent fees available for children in *More at Four* to help pay for extended year services. The estimated percentage of *More at Four* children who received financial assistance for extended year services from a source other than *More at Four* was 16%.

Administrators were asked to describe the availability of therapeutic services for children enrolled in *More at Four* programs, provided either through *More at Four* funding or other funding sources. Almost all programs had access to a speech/language therapist (98%), a nurse or other health care provider (92%), physical therapist (87%), occupational therapist (87%), psychologist or counselor (84%), and audiologist (80%). Services provided by a disabilities coordinator, social worker, curriculum specialist, English as a second language teacher, parent involvement coordinator or a kindergarten transition coordinator were available in over half the sites in January, 2003.

The *More at Four* program generally did not pay for these support services. Most *More at Four* counties relied on public schools for funding of the support services. The most frequent position supported by public schools was the speech therapist followed by the physical therapist, occupational therapist, psychologist and audiologist. The most frequent position supported by local Smart Start partnerships was a nurse or health care provider. Head Start most frequently contributed funds for a parent involvement coordinator.

Seventy-nine percent (71 of the 90) of the programs reported that transportation services were available, although 66% of the 90 programs said that transportation was a severe or moderate challenge for them. Transportation was the most frequent support service funded with *More at Four* funds. Of the 71 counties that offered transportation, 69% used public school funds, 14% used Smart Start funds, 15% used Head Start funds, and 13% used *More at Four* funds.

## Staffing Challenges

*More at Four* programs faced many challenges in staffing in the 2002-2003 academic year. Figure 1 shows how programs rated the staffing challenges. The responses for moderate or severe challenges are on the right side of the figure and the responses for minimal or not a challenge are on the left side of the figure, in order to demonstrate which issues were most and least difficult for *More at Four* programs.

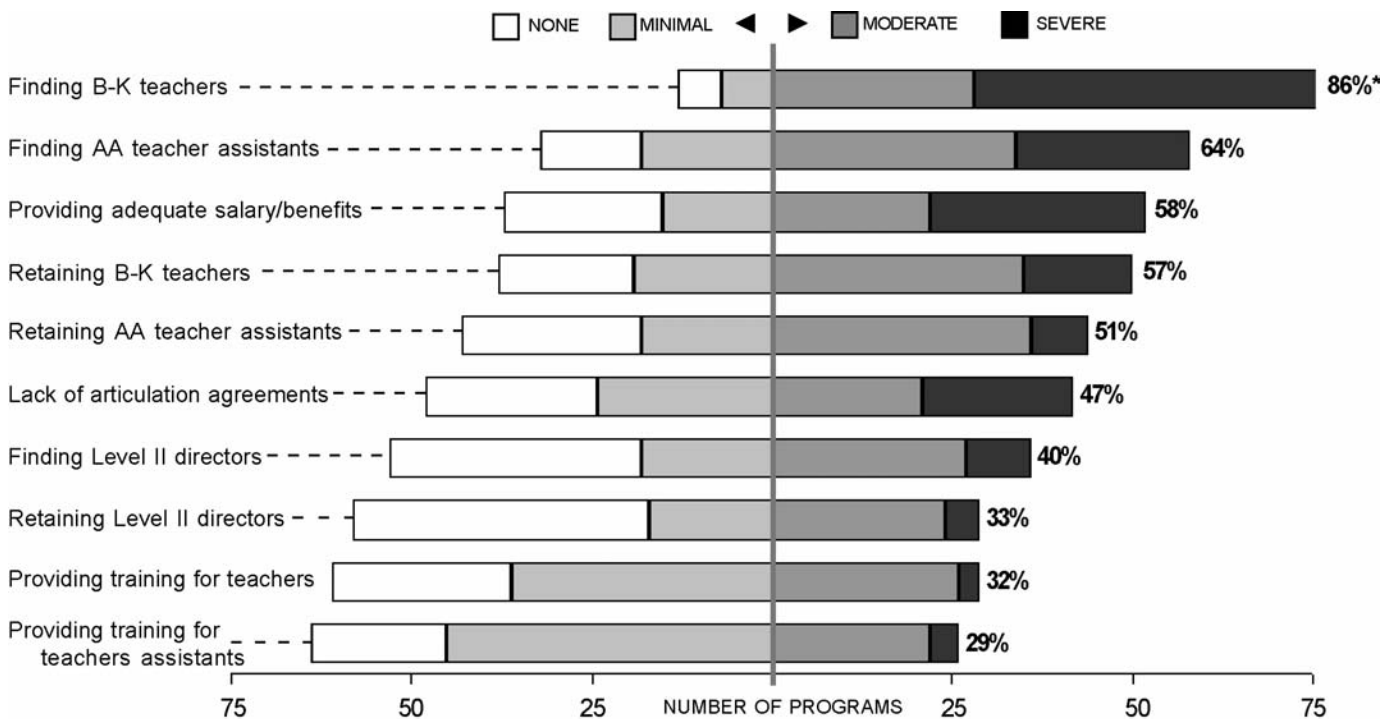
Finding enough teachers who had the required B-K licensure was a severe or moderate challenge for 86% of the *More at Four* programs. Only 14% of the programs rated this challenge as minimal or non-applicable to their program. In addition to finding enough qualified teachers, 64% of the programs found it difficult to find enough teacher assistants with a CDA or AA degree. Most programs (58%) had difficulty providing compensation and benefits commensurate with staff experience and education levels, which relates to the fact that 56% reported having trouble retaining B-K licensed teachers in the *More at*

Four classrooms. Retaining teachers with B-K licensure and teacher assistants with a CDA or AA degree was problematic for over half of the programs.

For *More at Four* programs operating in community-based child care settings, finding and retaining directors who had at least a Level II administrative credential was a challenge for almost half of the programs. The Level II credential requires three components: five semester credit hours of administration coursework (two courses) and an AA degree in Early Childhood Education plus a Level II portfolio. *More at Four* programs in school system sites are managed by school principals who must meet NC principal requirements.

About half the programs (47%) reported the lack of effective articulation agreements between community colleges and four-year colleges to help teachers obtain B-K licensure as a moderate to severe challenge. Providing training and development for teachers and assistant teachers was seen as slightly difficult or not a challenge for 68% of the programs.

**Figure 1. Staffing Challenges**



\*The percentage includes the number of programs reporting each item as a moderate or severe challenge.

## Operating Challenges

*More at Four* programs faced a variety of operating challenges in the 2002-2003 academic year. Figure 2 shows how programs rated operating challenges. The responses for moderate or severe challenges are on the right side of the figure and the responses for minimal or not a challenge are on the left side of the figure, in order to demonstrate which issues were most and least difficult for *More at Four* programs.

The list of challenges was topped by the need for more funding per slot. Eighty-three (83) percent of the programs experienced this challenge as moderate or severe. Financial challenges such as obtaining the required local contribution to operate the program and blending multiple funding sources were also difficult for close to 60% of the programs.

Space to provide the More at Four Program is clearly a challenge for many counties, as about 75% of the programs listed renovating new facilities or building new facilities as a moderate or severe challenge. Half of the programs (51%) reported that finding adequate space for more slots was a moderate or severe challenge; recruiting 3- to 5-star child care programs to serve More At Four children was moderately or severely challenging for 53% of programs; and recruiting Head Start programs was somewhat less challenging (38% found it difficult). Harder yet was helping improve 3-star centers to a 4-or 5-star rating (67%). A considerable number of programs (58%) experienced difficulty in recruiting sites to place children in specific geographic regions.

Although 46% of the counties offered extended year or summer care, 76% of the *More at Four* programs rated this as a moderate or severe challenge (see Figure 2). Providing before and/or after school services for children was somewhat less of a challenge for programs in that 66% rated this as a moderate or severe issue even though 54% of them provided this service. In addition to providing services, transporting children eligible for the program was noted by 67% to be problematic.

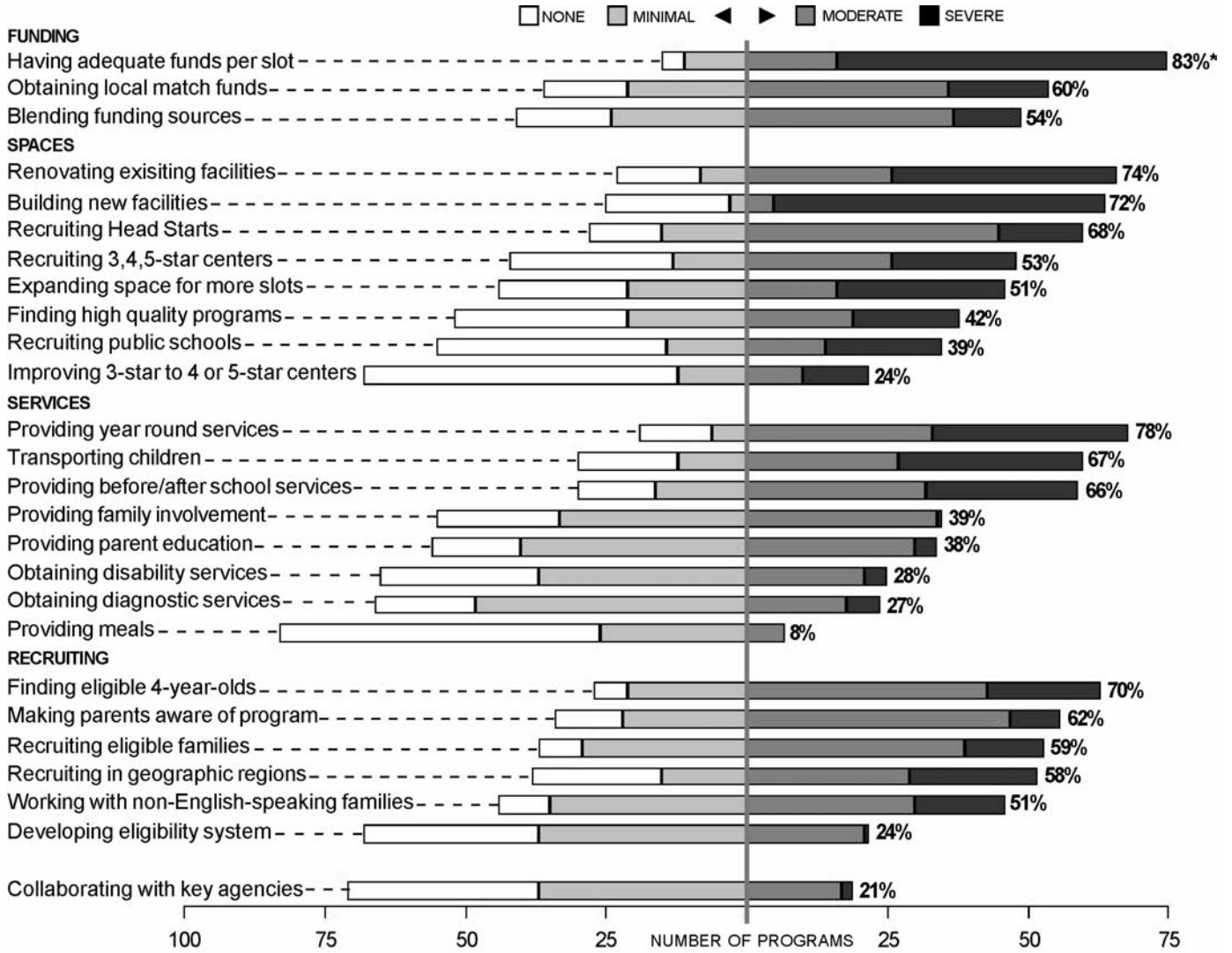
Respondents also mentioned that it was moderate or severely challenging to make the public and parents aware of the program (62%) and to communicate with families and children who do not speak English (51%). Programs rated providing opportunities for family involvement or parent education as less of a challenge (39%). Obtaining diagnostic and other services for children not currently identified with a disability and obtaining services for children who have been identified with a disability were serious challenges for only 27% of the programs.

Less problematic aspects of program implementation have been the development of a system for determining eligibility, recruiting public schools to serve children and collaborating with other key agencies, which were rated as challenging for less than 25% of the programs. Least challenging of all was the provision of meals and snacks, which only 8% of the programs found to be an issue.

Resources available to help with the administration of *More at Four* programs were available to almost 95% of the programs, although about half of the programs reported that these resources provided limited rather than adequate administrative support. These administrative functions include monitoring contracts/fiscal management, program planning and evaluation and professional development of administrative staff. Much of this administrative support was funded by sources other than the *More at Four* programs.

Respondents reported on expansion possibilities. At the current level of funds per slot (approximately \$3500/year/child in state funds; the remainder in other funds), administrators estimated that 768 additional children could be served in these 90 counties. Program administrators reported that most of these additional slots could be added in public schools (436) and community child care centers (298) with Head Start programs having the capacity to serve only an additional 34 children. Respondents were asked the estimated cost of serving additional children in their county and how many additional children could be enrolled. On average, counties reported that with the annual \$3500 of state funds per slot, an additional \$191 per month per child would be needed to provide early education for an average of 24 additional children per county.

## Figure 2. Operating Challenges



\*The percentage includes the number of programs reporting each item as a moderate or severe challenge.

## Summary

The *More at Four* Program targets at-risk children (typically low income, disabled, limited English proficient, and educationally delayed) who have never been served in any early education or care program who are eligible for financial assistance and are not receiving it, or who may have received limited services or low quality care. As of January 2003, 4,834 four-year-olds were enrolled in the *More at Four* Pre-kindergarten Program. These children were served in 489 classrooms in 388 sites (e.g., centers, schools) across 90 counties in North Carolina. Over half the sites (208) have before and/or after school care available for children and 47% (177) of the sites have extended year services for the summer months. About 17% of *More at Four* children receive financial assistance to attend the before and/or after school or summer classes.

When asked to rate the severity of various staffing challenges, *More at Four* administrators rated the following three staffing issues as the most challenging: 1) finding enough teachers with a B-K license, 2) finding enough teacher assistants with a CDA or Associate's degree, and 3) providing compensation and benefits commensurate with staff experience and education.

When asked to select the most severe operating challenges, *More at Four* administrators most frequently mentioned the following five operating challenges: 1) having adequate *More at Four* funds per slot, 2) adequate space (i.e., renovating, building, expanding), 3) providing wrap-around services (i.e., year-round as well as before and/or after school services, 4) transporting children to the program, and 5) finding families of four-year-olds who might be eligible for services.

The 2002-03 school year was the first full year of operation for the *More at Four* Preschool Program. In the short time since the program was conceived and initiated, 90 counties have provided educational opportunities for 4-year-old children who are at risk of experiencing difficulties as they enter kindergarten. In the 2003-04 school year the *More at Four* Preschool Program plans to expand services to at least 98 out of the state's 100 counties and plans to serve 10,000 children in 2003-04 (approximately double the number actually served in 2002-03).

The ability to establish a program across the state in such a short time in spite of major challenges indicates that addressing issues of children coming to kindergarten unprepared is seen as a true need by local communities. Local school systems, local Smart Start Partnerships, Head Start and child care programs (varying groups across counties) have been willing to participate and collaborate in an effort to help children who are most in need of a preschool education.

The fact that the most serious challenge faced by programs is a lack of funding per child indicates that sustainability and expansion may be difficult at the current per pupil expenditure. Unless funding per child is gradually increased, the *More at Four* Preschool Program may face choices of funding fewer children at a higher percentage of the true cost or securing permanent funding arrangements with school systems and other local programs in order to establish a sustainable program.

Currently counties must use other sources of funds to support extended day and extended year services beyond the *More at Four* Program to provide the full-day care needed by working parents, as well as an educational experience for children. Currently, subsidies can be combined with *More at Four* funds to provide an extended day for children who receive a subsidy. For children not receiving a subsidy, parent fees can be charged for the before and/or after school care. A sliding scale for working parents might be considered. However, the program aims to assist children with the most disadvantages, including those with unemployed parents so parent fees may not be a constant source of substantial assistance. Clearly

there is a need for additional funds to continue to implement high quality pre-K programs and to meet the *More at Four* Program standards for teacher credentials, curriculum implementation, appropriate environments, and transportation.

Responses from the Survey of *More at Four* Programs for the  
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**One person for each of the 90 counties receiving *More at Four* funding responded to this survey.**

**A. About *More at Four* programs**

1.	During January 2003, how many children participated in the <i>More at Four</i> program?	<u>4,834</u>	<i>Children</i>
2.	How many sites (e.g. centers, schools) in communities across North Carolina are serving <i>More at Four</i> children?	<u>388</u>	<i>Sites</i>
3.	How many classrooms are serving <i>More at Four</i> children?	<u>489</u>	<i>Classrooms</i>

***More at Four* programs are required to provide 6 - 6.5 hours of service per day for 180 days (10 months) of the year. However, some programs provide additional services with other resources.**

4.	How many of sites have before/after school services available for <i>More at Four</i> children?	<u>208</u>	<i>Sites</i>
5.	How many sites have sources of funds other than parent fees available to children in <i>More at Four</i> to help pay for before/after school services?	<u>192</u>	<i>Sites</i>
6.	The estimated percentage of <i>More at Four</i> children who receive financial assistance for before/after school services from a source other than <i>More at Four</i> .	<u>17.1%</u>	<i>% get aid</i>
7.	How many sites have extended year services (more than 10 months) available to <i>More at Four</i> children?	<u>177</u>	<i>Sites</i>
8.	How many sites have sources of funds other than parent fees available for children in <i>More at Four</i> to help pay for extended year services?	<u>155</u>	<i>Sites</i>
9.	The estimated the percentage of <i>More at Four</i> children who receive financial assistance for extended year services from a source other than <i>More at Four</i> .	<u>16.3%</u>	<i>% get aid</i>

**The Application Process**

10.	How many children applied for <i>More at Four</i> services for academic year 2002-03?	<u>9,216</u>	<i>Children</i>
11.	How many of these children were eligible for <i>More at Four</i> services for academic year 2002-03?	<u>5,575</u>	<i>Children</i>
12.	How many children are currently on <i>More at Four</i> waiting lists?	<u>791</u>	<i>Children</i>

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**B. Resources available for *More at Four* programs**

What resources are available to children enrolled in *More at Four* programs, either through *More at Four* funding or through other resources?

More than one source can be listed as funding these services.

Type of Resource	Resource Available in <i>MAF</i> counties		<i>More At Four</i>	Public Schools	Head Start	Smart Start
	Yes	No				
Nurse or other Health Care Provider	83	7	0	52	8	37
Speech/Language Therapist	88	2	0	77	1	2
Physical Therapist	78	12	1	66	1	1
Occupational Therapist	78	12	1	66	1	2
Audiologist	72	18	0	55	1	6
Psychologist or Counselor	76	13	2	57	5	14
Social Worker or Social Services Coordinator	66	17	0	43	14	6
Parent Involvement Coordinator or Family Liaison	50	40	1	25	22	13
Disabilities Coordinator	68	14	1	56	16	4
English as a Second Language Coordinator or Teacher	58	32	4	45	9	6
Kindergarten Transition Coordinator	49	41	0	34	13	11
Curriculum Specialist	62	28	1	38	9	12
Transportation Services	71	19	9	49	10	11

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**C. *More at Four* Staffing Challenges**

*More at Four* programs faced the following challenges in staffing in the 2002-2003 academic year.

*Numbers in the rows below indicate the number of counties reporting each level of challenge.*

	Need or Challenge	severe challenge	moderate challenge	minimal challenge	not a challenge	Mean
		<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	
1.	Finding enough <u>Teachers</u> who have B-K licensure	49	28	7	6	2.33
2.	Retaining B-K licensed <u>Teachers</u> in the <i>More at Four</i> classrooms	15	35	19	19	1.52
3.	Finding enough <u>Directors</u> who have at least a Level II Administrative Credential	9	27	18	35	1.11
4.	Retaining <u>Directors</u> with at least a Level II Administrative Credential in the <i>More at Four</i> sites	5	24	17	41	0.92
5.	Finding enough <u>Teacher Assistants</u> with a CDA or AA degree	24	34	18	14	1.76
6.	Retaining <u>Teacher Assistants</u> with a CDA or AA degree in the <i>More at Four</i> classrooms	8	36	18	25	1.31
7.	Providing compensation and benefits commensurate with staff experience and education levels	30	22	15	22	1.67
8.	Lack of effective articulation agreements between community colleges and four-year colleges to help teachers obtain B-K licensure	21	21	24	24	1.43
9.	Providing training and development for teachers	3	26	36	25	1.08
10.	Providing training for site administrative staff	4	22	45	19	1.12

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**D. *More at Four* Operating Challenges**

*More at Four* programs faced the following operating challenges in the 2002-2003 academic year.

*Numbers in the rows below indicate the number of counties reporting each level of challenge.*

Need or Challenge	severe challenge 3	moderate challenge 2	minimal challenge 1	not a challenge 0	Mean
1. Making the public/parents aware of the program	9	47	22	12	1.59
2. Finding families of 4-year-olds who might be eligible for services	20	43	21	6	1.86
3. Recruiting those families who are eligible to enroll their child in the <i>More at Four</i> program	14	39	29	8	1.66
4. Developing a system for determining eligibility	1	21	37	31	0.91
5. Finding enough high quality programs to serve <i>More at Four</i> children	19	19	21	31	1.29
6. Providing year-round services for children	35	33	6	13	2.03
7. Providing before/after school services for children	27	32	16	14	1.81
8. Communicating with families and children who do not speak English	16	30	35	9	1.59
9. Obtaining services for children identified with a disability	4	21	37	28	1.01
10. Obtaining diagnostic and other services for children not currently identified with a disability	6	18	48	18	1.13
11. Transporting children to and from the <i>More at Four</i> sites	33	27	12	18	1.83
12. Providing meals and snacks	0	7	26	57	0.44
13. Finding adequate space for additional slots	30	16	21	23	1.59
14. Building new facilities to serve more children	59	5	3	22	2.13

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**D. *More at Four* Operating Challenges - continued**

	Need or Challenge	severe challenge 3	moderate challenge 2	minimal challenge 1	not a challenge 0	Mean
15.	Renovating existing facilities to serve more children	40	26	8	15	2.02
16.	Recruiting 3- to 5-star child care centers to serve children	22	26	13	29	1.46
17.	Recruiting public schools to serve children	12	10	12	56	0.76
18.	Recruiting 3- to 5-star Head Start programs to serve children	21	14	14	41	1.17
19.	Moving 3-star centers to a 4-or 5-star rating	15	45	15	13	1.70
20.	Recruiting programs in specific geographic regions	23	29	15	23	1.58
21.	Having adequate <i>More at Four</i> funds per slot	59	16	11	4	2.44
22.	Obtaining the required local contribution to operate your program	18	36	21	15	1.63
23.	Blending multiple funding source	12	37	24	17	1.49
24.	Collaborating with other key agencies	2	17	37	34	0.86
25.	Providing opportunities for family involvement	1	34	33	22	1.16
26.	Providing opportunities for parent education	4	30	40	16	1.24

**From the above list, county respondents also identified the most or second most severe challenge for their *More at Four* program. The most frequently reported severe challenges were:**

- Having adequate *More at Four* funds per slot 38 respondents or 42.2%
- Transporting children to and from the *More at Four* sites 22 respondents or 24.4%
- Providing before/after school services for children 13 respondents or 14.4%
- Building new facilities to serve more children 12 respondents or 13.3%
- Finding families of 4-year-olds who might be eligible for services 12 respondents or 13.3%
- Finding adequate space for additional slots 10 respondents or 11.1%
- Making the public/parents aware of the program 9 respondents or 10.0%
- Renovating existing facilities to serve more children 8 respondents or 8.9%
- Providing year-round services for children 6 respondents or 6.7%

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**E. Resources for Administering *More at Four***

Respondents reported on the availability and adequacy of the following resources for administration of *More at Four* programs.

*Numbers in the rows below indicate the number of counties reporting each level of challenge.*

Activity	Adequacy			MAF Funded	
	None	Limited	Adequate	Yes	No
Monitoring	4	49	37	18	51
Contract/Fiscal Management	3	42	45	17	49
Program Evaluation	6	52	32	21	50
Program Planning	3	52	34	28	43
Planning/Managing Professional Development of Staff	5	57	28	28	41

**F. Feasibility of Expanding Services in FY 2002-03**

Respondents reported on expansion possibilities.

		Slots
1.	How many more children (slots) at the current amount of funds per slot could be served?	<u>768</u>
Of these <i>slots</i> , how many would be in:		
	Public schools.....	<u>436</u>
	Head Start.....	<u>34</u>
	Community child care centers.....	<u>298</u>
	Other ( <i>please specify</i> ): _____	<u>0</u>
2.	How many additional dollars <u>per slot</u> would be needed to provide more slots?	Mean \$191 Median \$180 Range \$0 - \$1000 <i>Add 1 \$ per slot per month</i>
3.	With more dollars per slot, how many additional slots could be created in your <i>More at Four</i> program?	Mean 24 Median 18 Range 0 - 130 <i>More slots</i>