
**Changes in the Work First Caseload in North Carolina:
September 2008**

by

Dean F. Duncan, III

Jordan Institute for Families
UNC-CH School of Social Work
Chapel Hill, NC
November 2008

Changes in the Work First Caseload in North Carolina: September 2008

This report explores changes in the Work First caseload in North Carolina in September 2008. This analysis is based on data extracted from the Eligibility Information System (EIS). These extracts are used to construct and maintain a longitudinal file that tracks the experiences of families who have participated in the Work First program in North Carolina. The analysis explores changes in the number of families participating in the program, changes in the number of case openings and case closings, information on families who are participating in the program for the first time, changes in the number of families receiving diversion assistance, and changes in the child only caseload.

The analysis uses extracts made from EIS in early November 2008. While information is available on families participating in the program in October 2008, it does not provide a complete assessment of all families that will receive benefits in October. There are a number of families that applied for benefits in October and whose applications are still pending when the extracts were made. Information on these families will be included in subsequent reports on the Work First caseload.

Figure One illustrates the changes in the Work First caseload over time. As the figure indicates, there were 28,171 families participating in the program in July 2007. The number of families participating in the program increased by close to 200 in September 2007 before falling to 26,563 in March 2008. The number of families began to rise at that point. By June 2008, the number of families increased to 26,808. It stayed near that level through July 2008, before rising. By August 2008, the number of families participating in the program had risen to 27,232. That number continued to rise—to 27,422—in September 2008. While that number is lower than the number participating in September 2007 (28,260), it is almost the same as the number of families participating in January 2008 (27,424).

The number of families who received diversion assistance is shown in Figure Two. As the figure indicates, 1,217 families received diversion assistance in July 2007. The number generally ranged between 1,100 and 1,300 from July through November 2007. In December, the number fell to 1,042, climbed slightly to 1,081 in January 2008, and fell to 852 in February 2008. The number of families receiving diversion assistance began to climb after February. By March,

the number had increased by close to 300 families to 1,143. The number increased to 1,311 in April 2008 before falling slightly in May. In July 2008, the number soared to 1,698 before falling to 1,371 in August and 1,242 in September 2008.

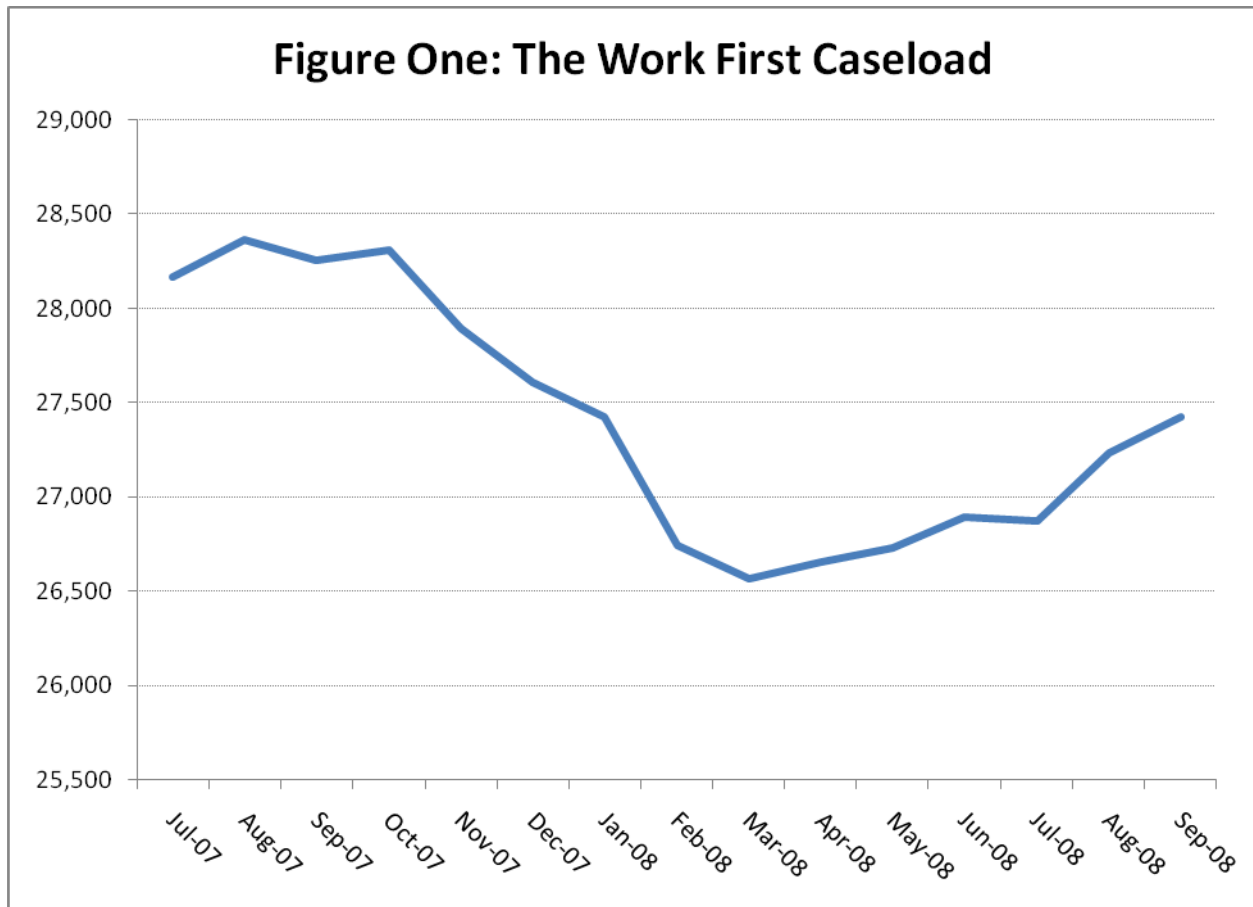
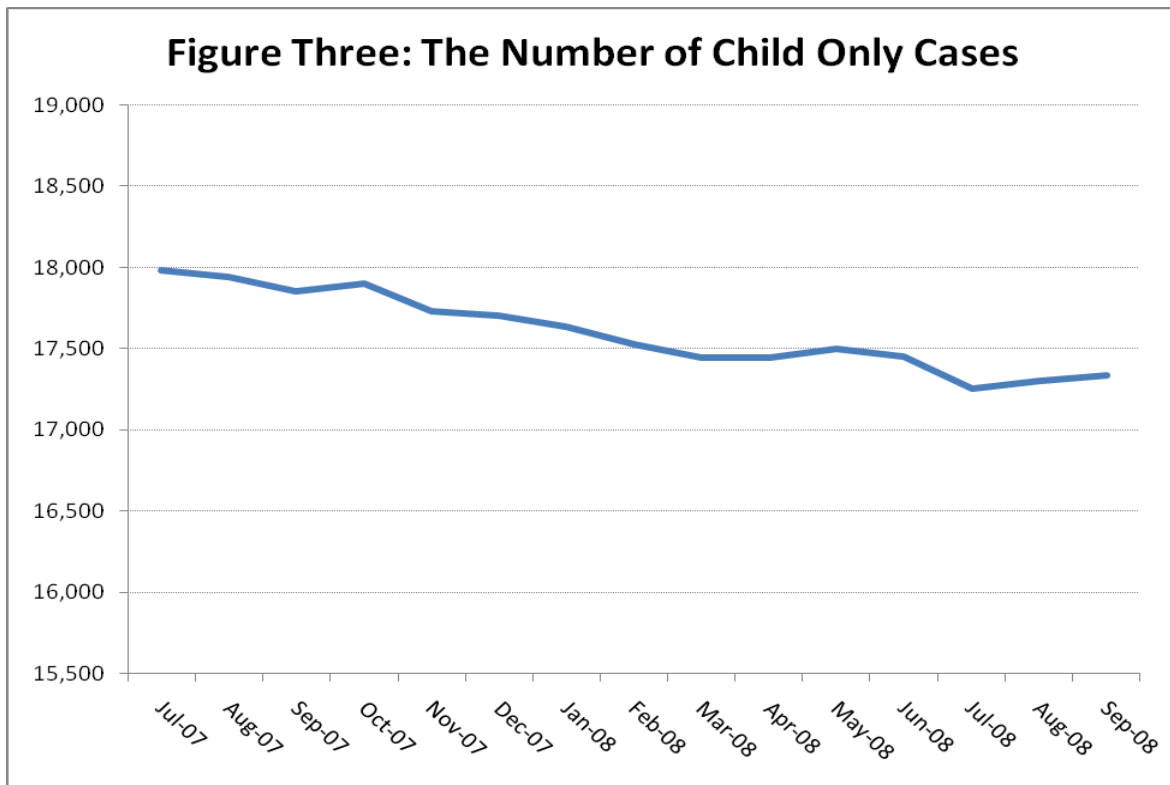
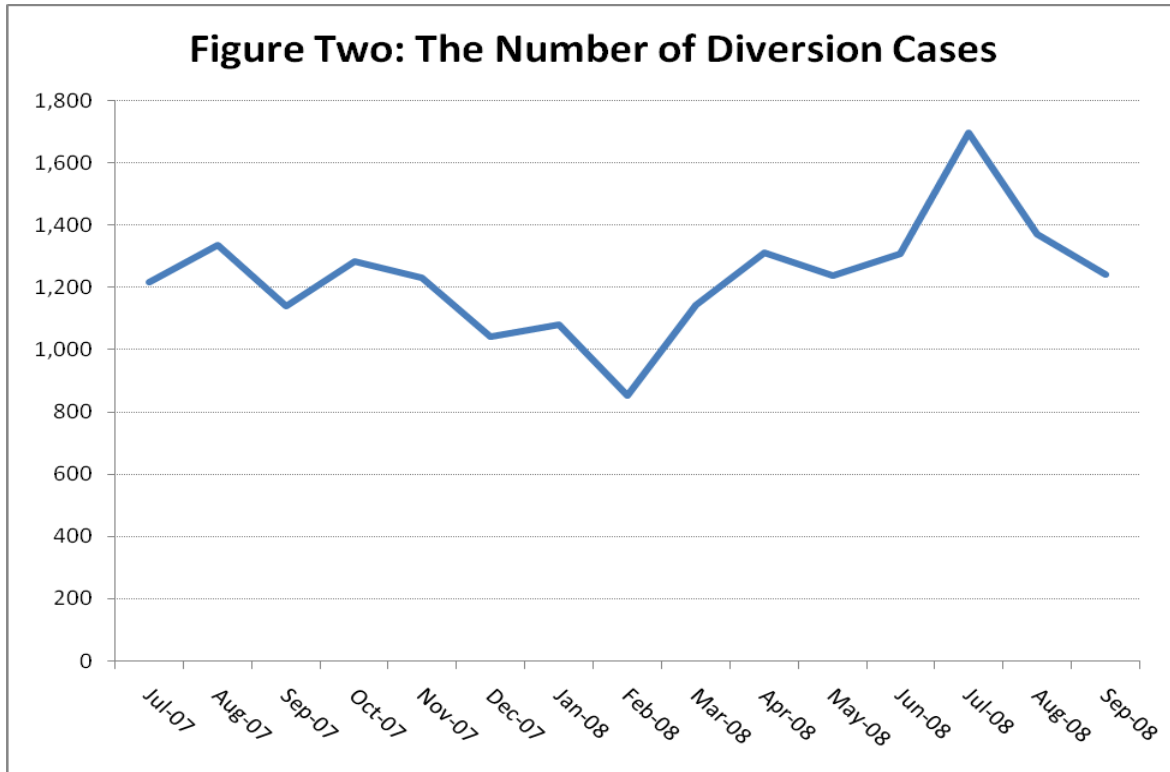
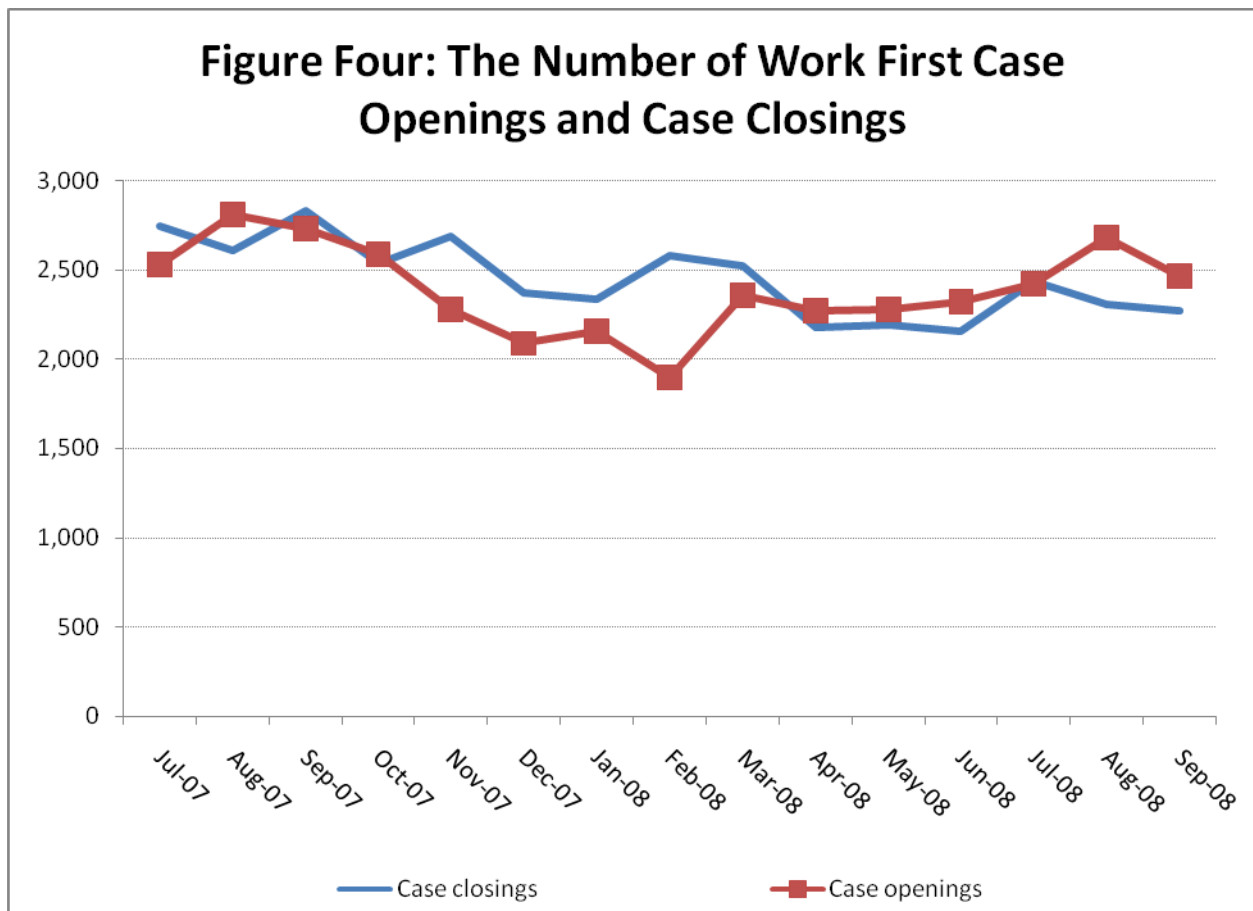


Figure Three tracks the number of child only Work First cases. According to the figure, the number of child only cases has fallen since July 2007. As the figure reports, in July 2007 there were 17,985 child only cases. That number declined steadily through September 2007, increased slightly in October 2007, then continued to fall through April 2008, to 17,441 cases. The number rose slightly in May 2008, fell slightly through July 2008, then rose minimally in August and September 2008. Between September 2007 and September 2008, the number of child only cases fell by 523 cases, a decline of almost 3%.



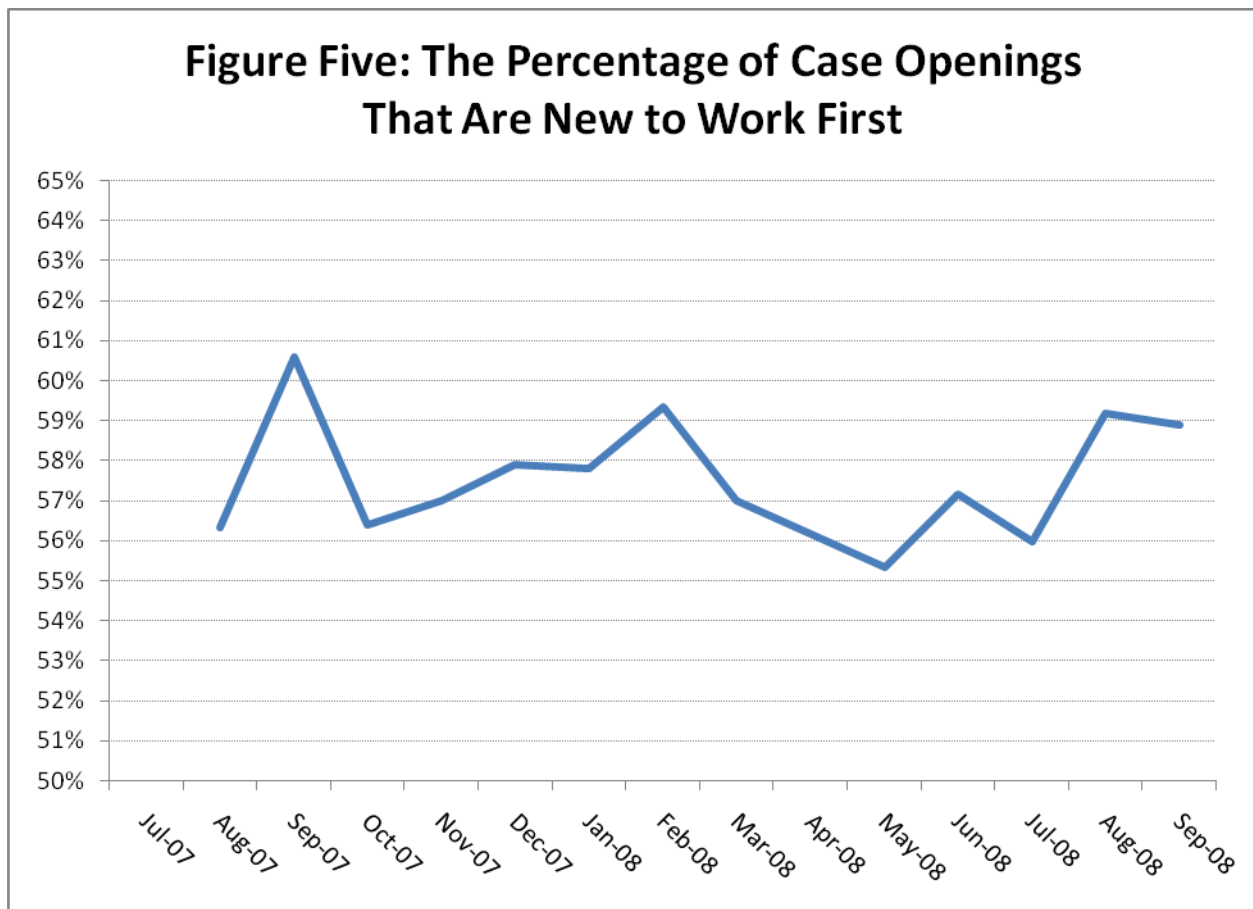
The number of case openings and case closings are important tools in understanding changes in the size of the caseload. In any given month, the caseload is equal to the caseload from the prior month minus the number of cases that closed plus the number of cases that were opened. Figure Four reports the number of case openings and case closings over time. In any month in which the number of case closings is higher than the number of case openings, the caseload will decline. If the number of case openings is greater than closing, the caseload will rise. That relationship depicted in Figure Four is consistent with the changes in the Work First caseload shown in Figure One. As Figure Four indicates, there were more case openings in August 2007 than closings. As a result, the caseload increased.



As Figure Four also indicates, the number of case closings in November 2007 through March 2008 were greater than the number of case openings. As a result, the caseload fell. The greater the distance between the number of openings and closings, the greater the decline in the caseload. As the figure indicates, the difference between the 2,581 case closings and the 1,895

case openings in February 2008 corresponds to the steep drop in the Work First caseload shown in Figure One. In April through June 2008, the number of case openings was slightly higher than the number of closings. This resulted in a slight increase in the Work First caseload. In August and September 2008, the number of openings were somewhat higher than the number of closings. This difference is associated with the increase in the Work First caseload shown in Figure One.

Case openings can be divided into cases for families who are new to the program and those who had left the program in an earlier month and who are now returning to the program. Figure Five illustrates the percentage of openings associated with cases that are new to the



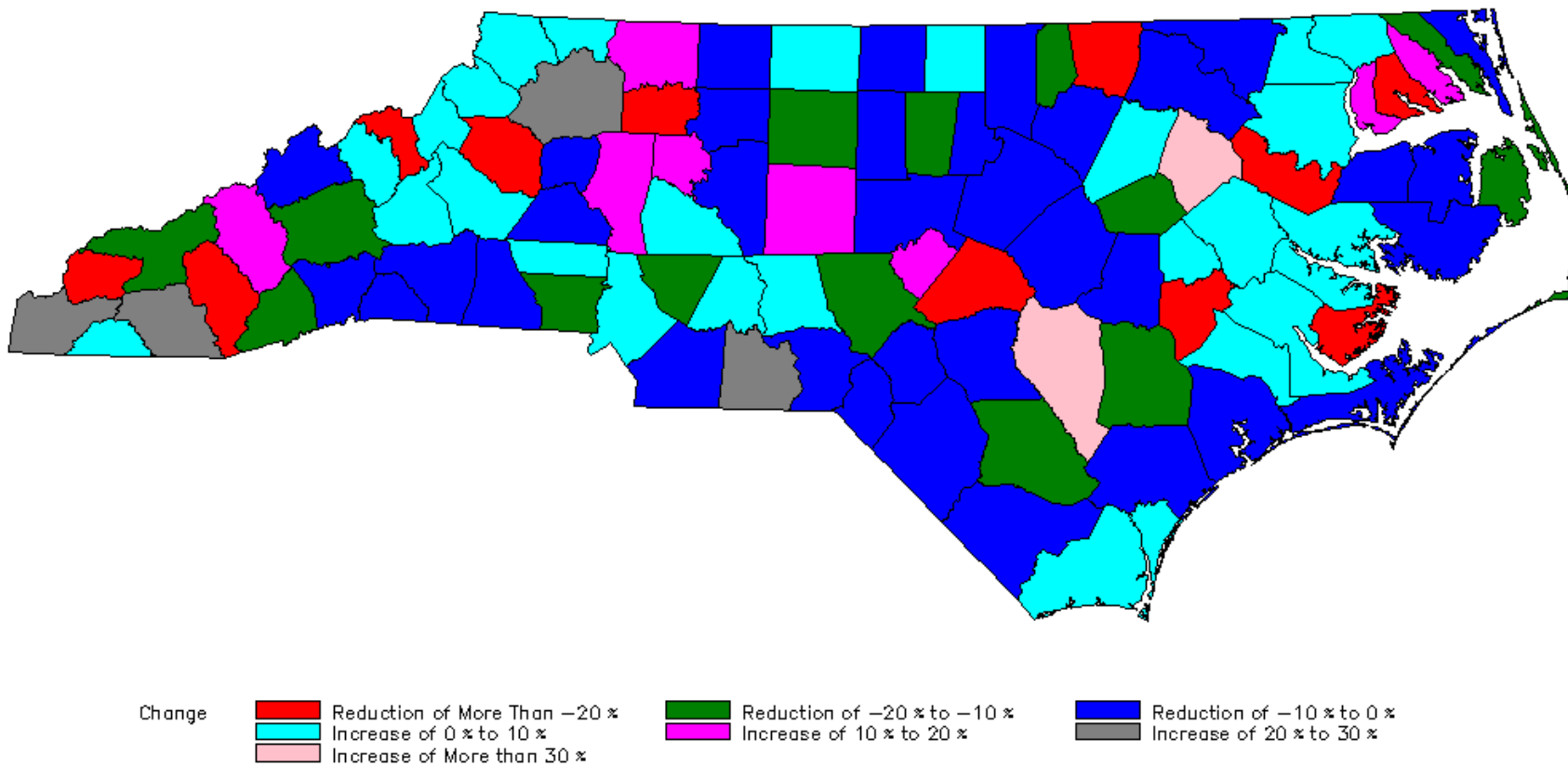
program. As the figure indicates, the percentage of cases that are new to Work First generally ranged between 56% and 60% between August 2007 and September 2008. The percentage of case openings associated with families who were new to Work First in September 2007 was

60.6%. That percentage dropped in October 2007 and stayed between 56.5% and 59.5% through April 2008. In May 2008, the percentage of case openings associated with families who were new to Work First was 55.3%. Even though, as Figure Four reports, the number of case openings increased in August 2008, the percentage of those openings associated with families who were new to Work First was only 59.1%. In September 2008, when the number of openings also exceeded the number of closings, families new to Work First accounted for only 58.9% of the case openings.

Between September 2007 and September 2008, 61 counties reported a decrease in their Work First caseload. As Figure Six indicates, twelve counties had decreases in their caseload of more than 20%. An additional 14 counties had a decrease of 10% to 20%, and 35% had a decrease of up to 10%. During that time period, the statewide caseload declined by 2.9%, from 28,260 to 27,422. Even though the number of families on Work First across the state fell, a number of counties reported increases. As the figure reports, eight counties had increase of 10% to 20%, four had increases of 20% to 30%, and two had increases of more than 30%. The Work First caseload in Edgecombe County grew by 63%--from 235 to 384 families—between September 2007 and September 2008. Sampson County saw an increase of 59%--from 88 to 140 families—during that same time period.

Not all of the counties with a sizeable percentage increase had a large numeric increase in the number of families on Work First. Both Cherokee and Macon counties saw increases of between 20% and 30%, but in both counties, the actual number additional families participating in the Work First program were in the single digits. Macon County's 25% increase was due to one additional family coming onto the program. The 26.6% increase in Cherokee County was due to four additional families on Work First. The two additional counties whose Work First caseload increased by 20% to 30% saw a relatively large increase in the number of families coming onto the program. In Anson County, where the caseload increased by 20.6%, the number of families participating in the program increased from 150 to 181. Wilkes County's 22.6% increase is associated with a rise of 56 in the number of families receiving Work First benefits—from 248 to 304.

Figure Six: The Percentage Change in the Number of Families Receiving Work First Benefits Between September 2007 and September 2008



Summary

Analysis of the participation in the Work First program shows that the number of families has fallen over the last year. In September 2007, there were 28,260 families participating in the program. By September 2008, the number of households had declined to 27,422. The decrease has not been steady. From September 2007 through March 2008, the number of families had fallen to 26,563. The number of families participating in the program increased by 859 over the next six months. The number of families receiving diversion assistance increased by 103 between September 2007 and September 2008. There also was a sharp rise—to 1,698 families—in the number receiving diversion assistance in July 2008. Between July 2007 and September 2008, the number of child only cases fell by 650.

Even though the number of case openings fell and climbed over time, the percentage of cases associated with families who were new to the Work First program did not show a large amount of variation. The percentage of case openings associated with families new to the system did not always shift in the same direction as the number of case openings.

While the number of families receiving Work First benefits declined by 2.9% between September 2007 and September 2008, several counties recorded large increases. Overall, 61 counties had a lower number of families participating in Work First in September 2008 compared with September 2007. Twelve counties reported drops of more than 20%. On the other hand, two counties reported increases of more than 50%. In Edgecombe County, the number of families on Work First increased by 63% and the number of families participating in the program in Sampson County increased by 59%.