Igniting the Power of Collaborative Action

NC EARLY CHILDHOOD FOUNDATION
2017 IMPACT REPORT
Dear Friends,

2017 started with a jaw-dropping announcement by the Harvard University Center for the Developing Child. Researchers discovered that we had vastly underestimated the number of neural connections formed each second in the first few years of life. Rather than 700, the number was more than 1 MILLION neural connections per second!

As brain science continues to advance at an astonishing rate, it has built an irrefutable case that children’s earliest experiences are built into their bodies—shaping their brain architecture. These experiences build the foundation for future learning, and they build the foundation for our state’s future. Fortunately, North Carolinians have long recognized that the well-being of our communities and our state is directly connected to well-being of children.

In keeping with our history, North Carolina leaders are coming together to listen and learn, to collaborate and to take action. Throughout 2017, time and again state and local people came together across disciplines, sectors, systems, and political identities for one purpose—to do what is needed to support children's optimal development.

• Through NC Pathways to Grade-Level Reading hundreds of stakeholders have identified shared measures of success, determined where to act first, and are now identifying what actions to take to improve outcomes for young children. In 2017, leaders volunteered to participate, people stayed engaged and the number of partners grew.

• North Carolinians spoke up loud and clear to let the state know that its plan for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) needed to include a focus on early learning. Two-thirds of public comments submitted to the state were on early learning and the final plan included birth-to-eight strategies.

• More than 300 professionals working with children birth through age eight and their families participated in 14 community conversations to provide input into how to create the best possible future for young children in North Carolina.

These are just a few of the examples highlighted in our 2017 report. We are grateful to the many leaders who devote their time, energy, and expertise to our collective work. Acting together upon what brain science shows about how children develop will ensure the best possible future for our children and our state.

Best,

Tracy Zimmerman, NCECF Executive Director
OUR MISSION
To marshal North Carolina’s great people, ideas and achievements to build a foundation of opportunity and success for every child by the end of third grade.

OUR VISION
Each North Carolina child has a strong foundation for lifelong health, education and well-being supported by a premiere birth-to-age-eight system.
How We Define Success

North Carolina’s people, agencies, and organizations work collaboratively towards a common goal.

They agree on how to measure progress.
They coordinate strategies for the shared measures that take into account all aspects of children’s healthy development.
They align policies and practices with the measures along the developmental continuum, starting at birth.

**GOVERNMENT, POLICY, AND NONPROFIT LEADERS** make policy, practice and program decisions based both on research, data and analysis about what improves outcomes for children birth-to-eight and their families, and on the lived experience of those who shape children’s environments.

**PRIVATE SECTOR LEADERS** engage in practices and policies that improve outcomes for children and families and use their voices to call for birth-through-eight investments and policies.

**NORTH CAROLINIANS** support and expect early learning investments and policies that are rooted in how children develop and that support each child in fulfilling his or her potential.

**TOGETHER, EVERYONE** recognizes that literacy is rooted in birth-to-age-eight child development, and includes:
- Health and Development on Track Beginning at Birth
- Supported and Supportive Families and Communities
- High Quality Birth-to-Age-Eight Learning Environments with Regular Attendance
Our Role

We are the state’s only organization focused exclusively on children from birth through age eight—the most rapid period of development in human life. These years set the foundation for all the years that follow.

We are committed to creating an environment that brings many voices to the table, to accelerate collaboration toward a common agenda and to support a shared course of action.

PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING
NCECF engages business, faith, law enforcement, and community leaders as early childhood champions to effectively communicate the broad societal impact of policies that affect early development and learning.

SPEARHEADING COLLABORATION
NCECF leads and supports state and local collaborations—bringing together health, family support, and birth-to-eight leaders across government, policy, private, nonprofit, philanthropic and research sectors—to advance a shared vision and course of action for maximum impact for children and families.

ADVANCING POLICIES
NCECF provides policymakers, advocates, business leaders and the public with research and analysis about the impact of federal and state birth-to-eight policy and innovations proven to achieve results for young children.

Our work to promote understanding, spearhead collaboration, and advance policy is embedded in all that we do and in our signature initiatives, including NC Pathways to Grade-Level Reading, Family Forward NC, Advancing Early Learning through ESSA, NC Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, and Local Financing for Early Learning.
Our Impact

We approach our work from the belief that solving problems requires starting from a place that is energizing, promotes broad engagement, is rooted in exploration and grounded in research. This is our impact in 2017.

WE PROMOTE UNDERSTANDING
Parents are being heard and business leaders are taking action on early learning.

WE SPEARHEAD COLLABORATION
Communities are mobilizing and leaders are taking action on shared measures.

WE ADVANCE POLICY
North Carolina is accessing a first-of-its-kind compilation of best practices and policymakers are advancing a birth-through-eight continuum.

70 CROSS-SECTOR LEADERS
met in the first half of 2017 to determine where to focus action to improve early childhood outcomes.

41 NON-PROFITS
9 FOUNDATIONS
7 RESEARCH & HIGHER ED
6 GOVERNMENT AGENCIES
3 PARENTS
3 BUSINESSES
1 PRINCIPAL PARTNER

737 PEOPLE
participated in our webinars.

500 LEADERS
learned about using ESSA to strengthen state and local birth-through-eight systems.

3,800 PEOPLE
accessed papers on What Works for Third Grade Reading.

105 CROSS-SECTOR LEADERS
met in the second half of the year to consider what actions to take to improve early childhood outcomes.

34 NON-PROFITS
21 GOVERNMENT AGENCIES
17 RESEARCH & HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS
16 HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS, SCHOOL STAFF AND TEACHERS
8 PARENT REPRESENTATIVES
5 BUSINESSES
3 FOUNDATIONS
1 MEDIA PARTNER

300+ community early learning professionals & 2,000+ North Carolina parent voices informed their work.
Parents are being heard.

The voices of more than 2,000 North Carolina parents are guiding decisions on how to best support young children and their families through our meta-analysis of 18 parent surveys, focus groups, and meetings from across North Carolina, conducted by organizations that support children and families.

A Parent Advisory Team created with Book Harvest in Durham led an effort to engage parents on summer learning. English and Spanish-speaking parents helped develop messages and determine the best ways to reach parents in Durham.

Business leaders are taking action on early learning.

The NC Chamber of Commerce included a focus on early learning at its annual Conference on Education. The session, Third-Grade Reading Proficiency: Transforming the Workforce through Early Literacy, highlighted the importance of the birth-through-eight years and the NC Pathways to Grade-Level Reading.

NC members of the Business Roundtable, led by SAS CEO Jim Goodnight called on policymakers to develop connected data systems using the NC Pathways to Grade-Level Reading measures to track children progress.
Communities are mobilizing.

More than 500 leaders from early learning, local education agencies, superintendent offices, Title I, and Head Start learned through webinars and presentations about opportunities in the Every Student Succeeds Act to strengthen the birth-through-eight continuum.

14 COMMUNITIES

up from three in May 2015, are mobilized to take action through the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading.

14 COMMUNITIES

hosted conversations to provide input into how to create the best possible future for young children in North Carolina and guide the Pathways effort. These conversations brought together close to 300 professionals working with children birth through age eight.

180 COMMUNITY LEADERS

chamber and business leaders, local elected and appointed officials, Smart Starts and philanthropists from six counties participated in our all-day training in 2016 and 2017 to learn about local financing options for early learning. Three have since introduced a local financing initiative in their counties.
Leaders are taking action on shared measures.

**A CROSS-STATE-AGENCY PLANNING TEAM RECOMMENDED THAT**

“North Carolina continue the work initiated and led over the past two years by the NC Pathways to Grade-Level Reading to define and implement shared measures of success,” in its mandated report to the General Assembly on how to develop and implement a statewide vision for early childhood.

**OUR IMPACT • WE SPEARHEAD COLLABORATION**

- SAS is creating, pro-bono, an online, interactive data dashboard to make the disaggregated NC data for the Pathways measures accessible to organizations and communities working on improving outcomes for young children.

- **THE TRIANGLE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION**’s 2017 signature event brought together hundreds of donors and supporters to learn about early literacy. The North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation was a featured partner and led a morning workshop with more than 100 participants.

- **NC IMPACT** hosted a Pre-K Symposium for County Commissioners and School Board members. The North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation was a planning partner and a featured presenter.

- **BEST NC** highlighted the Pathways measures in its 2018 Facts and Figures education data publication.

- **THE NORTH CAROLINA PARTNERSHIP FOR CHILDREN, INC. (SMART START)** has aligned their accountability system with the Pathways measures.

- **THE INSTITUTE FOR EMERGING ISSUES** aligned kidonomics with Pathways.

- **THE NORTH CAROLINA INSTITUTE OF MEDICINE** has adopted the Pathways measures as part of its accountability system for NC’s Essentials for Childhood federal grant.

- **THE NC RURAL HEALTH INITIATIVE** examined how outcomes for children in rural and non-rural communities differ on key Pathways to Grade Level Reading measures of success.

- **NC CHILD** is including the Pathways measures in the state’s **KIDS COUNT** data center.

- **NC IMPACT** hosted a Pre-K Symposium for County Commissioners and School Board members. The North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation was a planning partner and a featured presenter.

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[Diagram with text:](Right) The Measures of Success—the whole-child, birth-through-age-eight measures that put children on a pathway to grade-level reading—are Pathways’ framework for aligning policies, practices and programs.
A first-of-a-kind compilation of best practice is guiding decision-making.

More than 3,800 unique users have accessed online the *What Works for Third Grade Reading* series of working papers since it launched in August 2017.

Created by the Institute for Child Success and the North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation, in collaboration with BEST NC, the working papers address 12 of the Pathways Measures of Success.

Policymakers are advancing a birth-through-eight continuum.

The General Assembly created the Birth to Third Grade Interagency Council and included the NC Pathways to Grade-Level Reading Measures of Success in the legislation.

North Carolina’s Every Student Succeeds Act plan includes birth-through-eight strategies developed through convenings and webinars we led with the NC Office of Early Learning at the Department of Public Instruction. Two-thirds of the public comments submitted to the state focused on early learning.

An effort to recommend a higher education attainment goal for the state and a plan to achieve it is taking a pre-K through postsecondary approach. myFutureNC is an effort chaired by leaders of North Carolina’s public education system.

Following our focused attention on the issue, the State Board of Education adopted, for the first time, a standard definition of chronic absence for North Carolina. The definition was consistent with guidance we shared.
NC Pathways to Grade-Level Reading

Pathways successfully brings diverse state and local stakeholders and leaders together, across health, family support, and early learning and education disciplines; across government, policy, private sector and nonprofit actors; across birth-through-age-five and kindergarten-through-third-grade systems; and across political identities.

Together, these stakeholders are defining a common vision, shared measures and coordinated strategies that support children’s optimal development beginning at birth.

What We Do:

BUILD TRUST • We create a space and facilitate people coming together to learn, discuss, co-create, and take action on improving third grade reading proficiency.

CONVENE • We convene and support a large Pathways Partners group of stakeholders that guide the work and smaller Action Teams that move the work forward.

MAKE DATA ACCESSIBLE • We make data and policy on the Pathways measures accessible for wide audiences.

ADVANCE POLICY AND PRACTICE • We collaborate with organizations, state agencies, funders and other partners to advance policies and practices that will make progress on the shared measures and put children on a pathway to grade-level reading.

“I know that you all have worked tirelessly over the past year to build collaboration and achieve ‘consensus’ on how we can help every child in NC be a successful student. This body of work is owned by us all and you have created a culture and environment where will and investment have grown.”
— ANITA BARKER, Director of Education and Engagement, United Way of NC

“It’s my pleasure to be a part of this project! I truly value all that I have learned from the participants.”
— TERRY STOOPS, Director of Education Studies, John Locke Foundation
Family Forward NC is an innovative business initiative to improve children’s health and well-being and keep North Carolina’s businesses competitive. Through research and the exchange of ideas among business leaders, employees and organizations, Family Forward NC promotes workforce investments that support children’s healthy development and a competitive business environment, both in the short and long term.

“For any workforce strategy, business leadership is key so we really do like the approach that is being taken by the Foundation to engage businesses. If you can really understand the needs of business and be able to wrap supports and programs around that, those are the policies that last the longest and have the greatest impact.”
— NAPOLEON WALLACE, Deputy Secretary, Rural Economic Development and Workforce

What We Do:

RESEARCH • We engaged a research firm to interview 300 North Carolina employers of all sizes to determine who is implementing family-friendly policies, what policies they are implementing, and their rationale for doing so or not. The poll also surveyed 300 employees to better understand their needs and desires concerning family friendly workplace policies and practices.

LISTEN, LEARN, ENGAGE • We engage, listen to and learn from businesses of all sizes across our state. And we’ll look to our Advisory Council to help guide the work.

SHARE WHAT’S WORKING • We share stories of businesses and employees benefiting from family friendly workplaces. We share the opportunities and the challenges business leaders face.

CREATE TOOLS TO SUPPORT ADOPTION OF FAMILY-FRIENDLY POLICIES • Guided by the research and what we continue to learn from businesses and employees, we will publish a toolkit for Family Forward workplaces, outlining a range of practices that improve child health and well-being, and keep businesses competitive.

RECOGNIZE EMPLOYERS • We promote small, mid, and large-size businesses and associations endorsing the toolkit and adopting a range of its recommendations. These partner businesses will receive special recognition on the Family Forward NC website and other materials.
Advancing Early Learning Through ESSA

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) strengthens federal support for early learning and provides new opportunities for birth-through-third grade alignment, accountability and funding.

We are leveraging ESSA as a tool to support state and local collaboration across birth-through-eight systems.

What We Do:

**BUILD AWARENESS** • We help education leaders understand the early learning opportunities in ESSA, how early learning supports district goals, and how to engage early learning leaders in district plan development.

**CONVENE CROSS-SECTOR LEADERS** • We convened district teams of Local Education Agency and early learning leaders. The meetings delved deeper into the early learning strategies available to districts, shared best practices, highlighted using early childhood data to make informed decisions, and provided time and support for working together on district plans.

**PROVIDE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND COACHING** • We provide intensive support to a small number of local teams, including coaching, materials, a shared learning community and plan review. Materials and lessons learned will be shared across the state.

“A well run program! The facilitators created a learning environment for a large audience. We walked away with a plan to improve our Early Childhood learning in Currituck County!”

— MATT LUTZ, Assistant Superintendent, Currituck County Schools

“The guided discussion with folks from school system, Smart Start, Head Start and key players in the early childhood system encouraged us to think of collaborative ways we can focus on children birth through 3rd grade. In a small rural county, we must find ways to stretch the resources we have. This can only be done with imagination, collaboration, and sharing across all programs working with these age groups. This conference supported looking beyond our own “turf” and planning for the needs of all children within our county.”

— KAE PARKER, Board Member, Partnership for Children, Transylvania County

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) strengthens federal support for early learning and provides new opportunities for birth-through-third grade alignment, accountability and funding.
NC Campaign for Grade-Level Reading

Since 2015, the North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation has led the national Campaign for Grade-Level Reading (CGLR) in North Carolina. The Campaign is a collaborative effort by more than 360 communities across the country, including 3,900 local organizations and 450+ state and local funders working to ensure that more children from low-income families succeed in school and graduate prepared for college, a career and active citizenship.

What We Do:

BUILD CAPACITY OF LOCAL COLLABORATIVES • We build capacity of communities to form strong and long-lasting collaborations to achieve measurable outcomes.

SUPPORT SHARED LEARNING • We lead a learning community to share best practices, data and resources.

CREATE TOOLS TO SUPPORT COMMUNITIES • We provide adaptable tools for communities to promote understanding of birth-to-eight child development and the importance of grade-level reading.

“The Chatham Reads collaborative is so thankful to be a part of the NC CGLR Community. The NC Early Childhood Foundation has been incredibly helpful in providing us with the tools we need to clearly define our goals and work together to help our children succeed. The NC Pathways project is a perfect alignment with the NC Campaign for Grade-Level Reading and the team at NCECF has worked so hard to assist us in achieving our goals in Chatham County.”

— KRISTA MILLARD, Program Coordinator, Chatham Reads

“The North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation facilitated several workshops prompting our Early Literacy Coalition to form action teams to finalize plans to write our Community Solutions Action Plan for the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading. NCECF has continued to offer support by reviewing our team’s work to refine our targets, time-bound milestones, activities, and priorities. The advice, feedback, and resources provided have propelled and encouraged our team to complete what has been sometimes challenging and time-consuming work. We are grateful for their expertise and unwavering support.”

— TERRY S. ATKINSON, PHD, Early Literacy Coalition, Pitt County
Local Financing for Early Learning

In 2016, the North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation published a financing toolkit, the first of its kind in the nation, to support NC communities in pursuing local investments for early childhood.

Our website—Local Funding for Early Learning: A North Carolina Community Toolkit—offers information on how local government works, the local budgeting process, funding streams, financing options, a community readiness assessment and case studies from across the country.

What We Do:

**SUPPORT SHARED LEARNING** • We lead a Learning Community of six counties, including regular conference calls and a system for sharing community documents.

**SHARE WHAT’S WORKING** • We stay up-to-date on local early financing developments in NC and around the country.

**CREATE TOOLS TO SUPPORT COMMUNITIES** • We maintain an online toolkit, including creating additional case studies.

**TRAIN** • We deliver training to interested and ready communities.

“Extremely useful overview of options and possibilities. The dynamic of sharing lessons learned, challenges and out of the box ideas with other counties/municipalities was really motivating.”
— MAUREEN COPELOF, Brevard City Council Member

“Well thought out. Clear on the how to’s. Good suggestion for short and long term. It was great to meet others in the state working on this critical issue for our communities and state.”
— SUSAN SCHWARTZ, Co-Chair, Ready for School, Ready for Life, Executive Director, The Cemala Foundation

Our new case study about the Cincinnati Preschool Promise highlights how community outreach was key to voters approving Issue 44 to increase property tax to expand quality preschool through the Cincinnati Public Schools and community-based providers.
HOW TO ENGAGE

Our work is driven by the belief that together we can realize greater outcomes for young children than any of us can produce on our own. Join us.

SUBSCRIBE TO OUR NEWSLETTER to stay up to date on early learning developments.

PARTICIPATE IN OUR WEBINARS. Archived webinars and other videos are online at youtube.com/buildthefoundation.

PARTNER WITH US to host a business-focused Family Forward NC presentation and discussion. Email us at ncecf@buildthefoundation.org.

BECOME A PATHWAYS PARTNER. Visit buildthefoundation.org/pathways-partners/

ACCESS OUR REPORTS at www.buildthefoundation.org, including the following resources that were created in 2017:

• The Research Basis for the Pathways Measures of Success • Data definitions of the Measures of Success and Pathways Influencers and the research for each measure, demonstrating the connections between the measures and third-grade reading proficiency.

• Pathways to Grade-Level Reading Initiative: What Do We Know? • Highlights what data is available in North Carolina on the Pathways measures and what data is not.

• What Works for Third Grade Reading • A compilation of evidence- and research-based policy, practice, program and capacity-building options on the twelve of the fifteen Pathways measures.

• How to Create Lasting Change: Using Targeted Action Teams to Support Broad & Inclusive Social Policy Decision-Making • Lessons learned from the North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation’s experience creating an action team to launch a collaborative effort to improve third grade reading outcomes in North Carolina.

• Not About Me, Without Me: Raising Parent Voice to Guide Early Childhood Policy • A meta-analysis of 18 parent surveys, focus groups, and meetings from across North Carolina, conducted by a wide range of organizations that support children and families.

• AttendANCe Counts • Examines the state of the state around chronic absenteeism policies and practices in North Carolina.

• Investing in Early Learning: Bright Spots in North Carolina • Highlights local action to expand investments in early learning across North Carolina.

• What Does NC Pre-K Cost? • A fact sheet outlining the findings of a report submitted to the NC General Assembly by the Department of Health and Human Services.

• Birth-to-Eight Provisions in the NC Budget • Overview of provisions that impact young children.

• NC Early Learning Funding • A presentation describing how the state finances early learning for the Institute for Emerging Issues Blue Ribbon Commission.

• Pathways Community Conversations: Meeting One Evaluation • An evaluation of 14 conversations with providers to guide Pathways’ work.

• Pathways Measures of Success Fact Sheet

• Pathways Partnership Guidelines

• Investing in North Carolina’s Healthy Future Fact Sheet

• Investing in North Carolina Future Workforce Fact Sheet

• Evaluations of Pathways’ Learning Teams

• Could Better Tax Policy Help Families Pay for Child Care?

• Evaluation of Pathways’ Data Action Team

• Chronic Absenteeism Fact Sheet

43% increase in website users

29% increase in Facebook followers

98% of community conversation participants agreed that the conversation was valuable and worth their time and that they were excited about Pathways

96% of Pathways Learning Teams members who identified where to act first said that they felt that their contributions to the process were valued
OUR BOARD

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Pritzker Professor of Early Learning Policy Studies, Duke University

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OUR STAFF

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Lisa Finaldi
Community Engagement Leader

Tiesha Pope
Finance Manager

Sumera Syed
Organizational Manager

Tracy Zimmerman
Executive Director

OUR FUNDERS

We are grateful to the organizations and individuals who invest in our shared vision to build a strong foundation for learning and life success for each North Carolina child.

• The Belk Foundation
• Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina
• ChildTrust
• The Duke Endowment
• First Five Years Fund
• The Goodnight Educational Foundation
• The InSight Fund of the Triangle Community Foundation
• Skeeb Foundation
• The Triangle Community Foundation
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