

High Quality Birth to Eight Care and Education Design Team

Work group: Positive school climate

Research tells us that school climate is critical to school quality. Schools that focus on supporting children and families by creating welcoming environments where everyone feels they belong are more likely to keep children academically engaged and successful.

Outcomes:

- Students have access to programs in their native languages
- Children attend elementary schools that systematically involve child care programs/families before school transition
- Children attend schools that reflect the socio-economic diversity of their school districts
- Early care and education programs and schools integrate social-emotional strategies
- Suspension and expulsion policies in programs and schools are used sparingly and equitably

North Carolina has a lot of assets in place! There has been a lot of excellent work already done in North Carolina around these issues. Pathways would like to lift up and leverage these assets. We have talked with some of you and surveyed the larger Pathways Partners (stakeholders) group to learn about some of the great initiatives that are helping us move towards these outcomes. Here is what we have learned.

Integrated Birth to Eight System for High Quality Care and Education

- NC is drafting its ESSA plan, which will help define what quality education means for our state and offers opportunities to improve policies.
- The General Assembly has called for an integrated birth to eight system.
- The NC Office of Early Learning within DPI brings together some of the pieces of the B-8 system in NC.
- The recently-released House and Senate versions of the NC state budget call for formative assessments in the K-3 years.
- The NC Division of Child Development and Early Education currently houses many parts of the B-8 system in NC, including licensing and assuring the health and safety of early care and education programs who serve children from birth through age eight, providing financial assistance for children in licensed early care and education programs serving children from birth through age eight, administering the state's NC Pre-K program, coordinating teacher licensure support for teachers working outside the public school system, administering the state's Child Care Development Fund plan and the Quality Dollars allotted to improve the early care and education system, funding and monitoring the state's child care resource and referral system to help families of all children from birth to age eight find the appropriate early care and education that meets their needs, managing the contract for Smart Start with the NC Partnership for Children, and more.

Positive School Climate

- There is increasing conversation and reporting around the effect of trauma on learning and the importance of creating safe and supportive schools. (e.g., NC Public School Forum Committee on Trauma and Learning and the Safe and Supportive Schools Initiative, model programs around the state, like Compassionate Schools in Buncombe County Schools).
- There is pilot work to build trauma-sensitive whole school learning environments through specific professional development for educators and building students' resilience, in six school districts over a 3-year period. (Public School Forum's NC Resilience and Learning Project)
- Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS) is expanding across the state, including effective teaching practices for Tier I Language and Literacy and Social-Emotional Health for both regular and special education teachers. Tier II and III practices for teachers and administrators are also on the horizon.
- The NC Ready Schools Initiative and toolkits offer education and training for schools and communities around all aspects of ensuring schools (PK-3rd grade) are ready for students, including leaders and leadership, family and school partnerships, transitions, respecting diversity, engaging environments, effective curricula, teaching supports, measuring progress and quality assurance.
- There are NC recommendations around transition planning and updates on the state's progress on developing and implementing a standardized program to transition children from preschool to kindergarten, including developing and piloting a readiness measure, with information-sharing on the individual child level between Pre-K programs and public schools.
- NC has developed Early Learning and Development Progressions (0-5) based on the NC Foundations for Early Learning and Development. Learning progressions were developed for each identified goal in four developmental domains, and show the steps through which children develop skills from birth to five years. The comprehensive observation guidelines include age level, skill being observed, situation for observation of skills, strategies for eliciting the skill, if needed, what observed behavior indicates achievement of the skill, and routines-based intervention or embedded instruction. Teachers are being trained in these progressions, and there are conversations about how to use them to share information between preschools and elementary schools when children transition to kindergarten.
- The NC Healthy Social Behaviors Initiative addresses behavioral issues in young children by offering services designed to identify, prevent and modify challenging behaviors with a goal of reducing the expulsion rate and promoting social-emotional development of all children in NC licensed child care centers.
- NC DPI publishes disaggregated data annually on suspensions and expulsions in public schools
- The North Carolina State Improvement Project provides personnel development and program support services to significantly improve the performance and success of students with disabilities in North Carolina.

- The NC Infant Toddler Quality Improvement Project provides highly trained specialists across NC to help early childhood programs improve infant and toddler classrooms.