



# NC Pathways to Grade-Level Reading

## The Challenge

**It's our moment.  
Will we we seize it?**

It's time to build on North Carolina's proud history of innovation and success for young children to tackle one of the greatest challenges currently facing the state: the overwhelming majority of our children, especially those from low-income families, are not reading proficiently by the end of third grade. Reading well in the early grades predicts a child's academic and career success.

Research shows that improving third grade reading takes a coordinated birth-to-age-eight approach that focuses on children's health and development, families and communities and high quality learning environments with regular attendance. It takes aligned policies and practices all working toward a common vision.

**What would be possible if . . .**

We adopted shared, whole child, birth-to-age-eight measures that put children on a pathway to grade-level reading?

We coordinated strategies to support children's optimal development beginning at birth?

We aligned policies and practices that were rooted in how children develop?

## Our Vision

People, agencies and organizations working collaboratively towards a common goal, agreeing on how to measure progress, coordinating strategies that take into account all aspects of children's healthy development, and aligning policies and practices along the developmental continuum, starting at birth, to maximize each child's potential.

All recognize 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 and Regular Attendance

**Why Birth through Age Eight?** It's a unique time when the most rapid period of development in human life happens. Brain scientists have discovered that during children's earliest years, their experiences are built into their bodies – shaping the brain's architecture and creating the foundation for future learning. Everything a child experiences from birth impacts that child's ability to fulfill his or her potential.

## What is NC Pathways to Grade-Level Reading?

NC Pathways to Grade-Level Reading (Pathways) has a bold vision – *all North Carolina children, regardless of race, ethnicity or socioeconomic status, are reading on grade-level by the end of third grade, so that they have the greatest opportunity for life success.* Achieving it will take long-term commitment.

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. These stakeholders are co-creating a common vision, shared measures of success and coordinated strategies that support children's optimal development beginning at birth.

Pathways is committed to creating an environment that brings many voices to the table to accelerate collaboration toward a common agenda and support a shared course of action. We judge our impact by our ability to engage multiple perspectives and build research-based consensus about the best path forward. Each stage of the Pathways work has added people to the effort. Currently stakeholders from more than 90 organizations are participating.

NC Pathways to Grade-Level Reading is an initiative of the NC Early Childhood Foundation in collaboration with NC Child, The North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc., and BEST NC.

## What We Do

We create a space and facilitate people coming together to learn, discuss, co-create, and take action on improving third grade reading proficiency. We guide a process to help move the state through:

- Identifying-research based measures of success that will move the needle on reading proficiency,
- Learning how North Carolina is doing on those measures, including where the biggest inequities lie,
- Determining where to move to action first,
- Developing strategies to make progress on the measures,
- Developing strategies to improve data collection and analysis on the measures.

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

We make data and policy on the Pathways measures accessible for wide audiences in order to:

- Shift the conversation in North Carolina towards the importance of thinking birth-to-age-eight and whole child,
- Encourage the alignment of systems and policies across the birth-to-age-eight continuum and across childhood domains, and
- Give change-makers the tools they need to support policies, practices and capacity-building that move the needle on early literacy.

Phase I (Spring 2016)	Phase II (Fall 2016)	Phase III (2017)	Phase IV (2018)
State leaders – working with a Data Action Team composed of 30 experts from NC’s leading universities, research institutes, government agencies, businesses and think tanks – identified shared birth-to-age-eight, whole child measures to put children on a pathway to grade-level reading.	Learning Teams looked at the NC data around those measures to make sense of the trends, inequities, patterns and connections in the data. Prioritizing need and equity, Learning Teams chose measures that they recommend North Carolina move to action on first.	Design Teams will create policy, practice and capacity agendas for the prioritized measures of success, answering the question: What needs to change in North Carolina to improve child and family outcomes on these critical measures?	Pathways will seek support for the creation of a task force on early literacy to advance the policy, practice and capacity agendas created by the Design Teams, while new Design Teams are formed to create agendas for the next set of prioritized measures of success.

## Our Impact

### Shared Measures of Success Identified

State leaders identified shared birth-to-age-eight, whole-child measures of success to put children on a pathway to grade-level reading.

**95%**

of stakeholder respondents said they “felt confident that if the state made progress on these measures, we would improve third grade reading outcomes.”

### NC General Assembly Endorses Work

The NC General Assembly highlighted our work in the 2016 budget when it passed provisions calling for greater birth-to-age-eight coordination across agencies and organizations, “including consideration of the NC Pathways to Grade-Level Reading.”

*“Increasing third-grade reading proficiency is critical to the future success of North Carolina children and sustained economic growth in our state. The strong coalition of partners the North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation has brought together for the NC Pathways to Grade-Level Reading Initiative will help us put into place the policies and programs necessary to achieve this goal. We support the thoughtful and evidence-based approach led by the Foundation to ensure all North Carolina children are prepared to succeed in school and beyond.”*

**Ann Goodnight, Senior Director, Community Relations, SAS**

The North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation **promotes understanding, spearheads collaboration, and advances policies** to ensure each North Carolina child is on track for lifelong success by the end of third grade.



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