

# A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR CHILDREN



NORTH CAROLINA EARLY CHILDHOOD FOUNDATION  
**2018** IMPACT REPORT



[www.buildthefoundation.org](http://www.buildthefoundation.org)

# OUR **VISION**

Each North Carolina child has a strong foundation for lifelong health, education and well-being supported by a premiere birth-to-eight system.



# 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.

# BUILDING A CRITICAL FOUNDATION

The first eight years of a child's life build a foundation for all future learning. In fact, the early years are so defining that third-grade reading outcomes can predict future academic achievement and career success.





# ABOUT NCECF

Decades of research show that strong brains and bodies are built when children have:

- Health and development on track from birth
- Supported and supportive families and communities
- Access to high-quality birth-to-eight learning environments with regular attendance



## THROUGHOUT NORTH CAROLINA, SCHOOLS, POLICYMAKERS AND COMMUNITY AND BUSINESS LEADERS ARE RECOGNIZING THE IMPORTANCE OF INVESTMENTS IN YOUNG CHILDREN.

In fact, 80 percent of North Carolina voters across the political spectrum want the state to double its investment in early childhood development.

North Carolina has already taken great strides, and the momentum is building.

As the state's only organization focused exclusively on children from birth through age eight, we work to promote understanding, spearhead collaboration and advance policies to ensure each North Carolina child is on track for lifelong success by the end of third grade.

## PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING

We engage business, faith, law enforcement and community leaders as early childhood champions to effectively communicate the broad societal impacts of policies that affect early development and learning.

## SPEARHEADING COLLABORATION

We bring together health, family support and birth-to-eight education leaders across the government, policy, private, nonprofit, philanthropic and research sectors to lead and support state and local collaborations that advance a shared vision and course of action for maximum impact for children and families.

## ADVANCING POLICIES

We provide policymakers, advocates, business leaders and the public with research and analysis about the impact of federal and state birth-to-eight policies and innovations proven to achieve results for young children.

Our work to promote understanding, spearhead collaboration and advance policy is embedded in all we do, including our signature initiatives:

### ► PATHWAYS TO GRADE-LEVEL READING

A movement to ensure that all North Carolina children are reading on grade level by the end of third grade.

### ► FAMILY FORWARD NC

An innovative, business-led initiative to improve children's health and well-being and keep businesses competitive by increasing access to family-friendly workplace practices.

### ► CAMPAIGN FOR GRADE-LEVEL READING

Mobilizing communities to ensure that more children from low-income families succeed in school and graduate prepared for college, a career and civic engagement.

### ► EARLY LEARNING AND THE EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT

A collaboration to develop early learning components for the state and district-level ESSA plans.

### ► LOCAL FINANCING FOR EARLY LEARNING

The first toolkit nationwide to support local communities in pursuing local, public investments in early childhood.

### ► FIRST 2,000 DAYS

An open source campaign that provides presentations and supporting materials for communities across NC and the country to start early childhood advocacy campaigns.

# DEFINING SUCCESS

Building a successful foundation for each child in North Carolina depends on the collaboration and coordination of our state's people, agencies and organizations.

We believe each North Carolina child will have access to a successful foundation when our state's people, agencies, and organizations:

- Agree on how to measure progress.
- Coordinate strategies for shared measures that take into account all aspects of children's healthy development.
- Align policies and practices with the measures along the developmental continuum, starting at birth.

That means:

- Policymakers and community leaders make policy, practice and program decisions informed by research, data, the lived experiences of those who shape children's environments and analysis about what improves outcomes for young children and their families.
- Private sector leaders engage in practices and policies that improve outcomes for children and families and use their voices to call for birth-to-eight investments and policies.
- North Carolinians support and expect early learning investments and policies that are rooted in how children develop and support each child in fulfilling his or her potential.
- Together, everyone recognizes that literacy is rooted in birth-to-eight child development, and includes: health and development on track beginning at birth; supported and supportive families and communities; and high-quality birth-to-eight learning environments with regular attendance.



# LETTER FROM OUR BOARD CHAIR

North Carolina has a wealth of great leaders and organizations working to build a foundation of success for children. As we celebrate both our fifth anniversary and 2018—a year for tremendous growth and transition—we look back at the strong foundation we’ve built within our own organization.

Since 2013, NCECF has become a “go to” organization known for bringing our state’s many leaders and organizations together to create intentional, thoughtful collaboration and action to improve child health, education and well-being.

Through all of our work, we seek to add value by creating opportunities for shared learning, problem solving and success. Why? Because we know the best results are achieved when we tap into the collective potential and positive energy of diverse perspectives, cultures, agencies and organizations—from nonprofit to corporate to government and policy. We know that we can accomplish more together than any one of us can alone.

Throughout this report, we celebrate some of our successes from our first five years. We also dig in to our milestones for 2018, which include:

- Working with our NC Pathways to Grade Level Reading partners across the state—including Design Teams comprised of cross-sector content experts, data experts, policy thinkers and family representatives—to finalize recommended strategies for action around three areas of focus: children’s social-emotional health, high quality birth-to-eight early care and education and regular school attendance. In late 2018, Pathways partners approved the Action Framework created by our Design Teams.
- Gathering feedback from more than 1,000 NC employees and employers on employers’ motivations behind the family-friendly practices they currently offer, the ones they want to offer and the barriers to offering them. We used this data to inform our Family Forward NC work.

- Securing commitments from 80 local school district teams to develop birth-to-eight strategies and measures in their local Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) plans.
- Influencing statewide change on chronic absence. In February, the NC State Board of Education established a standard definition of chronic absenteeism to be used in public schools across the state. The Board’s definition of chronic absence as missing more than 10 percent of enrolled school days in a given year is consistent with guidance shared by NCECF.

Finally, I want to take a moment to welcome our new Executive Director, Muffy Grant, who will take the helm at NCECF in June. Muffy joins us most recently from Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina, where she served as Director of Development. We also welcome Mary Mathew, our new Collaborative Action Manager, to the team.

I also want to thank our outgoing executive director, Tracy Zimmerman, who left NCECF in February for a new role at the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. Tracy’s leadership and dedication have been instrumental to NCECF’s growth and success. We are grateful to her and to the many partners, supporters, and advocates who have helped us build our own strong foundation as an organization.

Sincerely,



Easter Maynard  
*Chair, Board-of-Trustees*





# OUR IMPACT **THE FIRST FIVE YEARS**

"NCECF has a strong history with taking a multi-pronged approach that includes business, community and civic leadership." — *Carla Garrett, Title I preschool consultant for the NC DPI Office of Early Learning*



# OUR **IMPACT** 2013-2018

We built bipartisan support for investments in children's early learning.

► **15% MORE VOTERS SAY WE SHOULD DO MORE FOR EARLY EDUCATION.**

In our 2018 poll of registered NC voters, **80 percent say we should do more for young children's education**—a 15 percent increase over our first poll in 2014.

► **12% MORE VOTERS SUPPORT EXPANDING ACCESS TO NC PRE-K AND SMART START.**

**86 percent of voters supported expanding access** to NC Pre-K and Smart Start in 2018, up 12 percent from four years ago.

We've engaged with business, community, education and government and policy leaders to inspire them to collaborate on shared measures and actions to support child health, education and well-being.

► **1,000 NORTH CAROLINA EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES WEIGHED IN ON FAMILY-FRIENDLY WORKPLACES.**

**We've engaged more than 1,000 employers and employees** across the state as part of Family Forward NC—our bold initiative to increase access to family-friendly workplace practices such as paid parental leave, support for breastfeeding mothers and accommodations for pregnant workers.

► **11 COMMUNITIES COMMITTED TO HELPING CHILDREN FROM LOW-INCOME FAMILIES SUCCEED.**

Since 2015, NCECF has led the national Campaign for Grade-Level Reading in North Carolina, **growing the number of communities involved in the Campaign from three to 14 across the state.**

► **HUNDREDS OF LEADERS UNITED TO CREATE A FRAMEWORK TO SUPPORT ALL CHILDREN.**

Since 2015, **hundreds of state leaders have worked across sectors, geography and the political aisle to co-create the NC Pathways to Grade-Level Reading Measures of Success and the Pathways Action Framework.** The Action Framework lays out a series of expectations for state and local birth-through-age-eight child and family systems with the aim of improving third grade reading proficiency and overall child and family well-being.

We've helped influence policy change to achieve results for young children.

► **PATHWAYS WORK LED LEGISLATORS TO CALL FOR COORDINATION ACROSS AGENCIES.**

**The NC General Assembly cited NCECF's Pathways Initiative** in its 2016 and 2017 budgets when it passed and updated provisions calling for greater coordination across agencies.

► **80 LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND THE STATE COMMITTED TO INCLUDING EARLY CHILDHOOD IN ESSA PLANS.**

The North Carolina state Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) plan includes birth-to-eight recommendations developed at two convenings of local and state leaders led by NCECF. Additionally, **80 local school districts attended regional meetings hosted by NCECF** in conjunction with the NC Head Start State Collaboration Office, the Office of Early Learning at the NC Department of Public Instruction, and EducationCounsel to develop shared commitments for birth-to-eight strategies in their local work.

# OUR REACH

We focus on improving outcomes for NC children statewide, and our reach is both broad and deep. We work closely with partners in 49 counties across NC to provide support for lasting impact.

- ▶ Alamance
- ▶ Ashe
- ▶ Avery
- ▶ Beaufort
- ▶ Bertie
- ▶ Buncombe
- ▶ Cabarrus
- ▶ Catawba
- ▶ Chatham
- ▶ Cherokee
- ▶ Chowan
- ▶ Clay
- ▶ Craven
- ▶ Duplin
- ▶ Durham
- ▶ Edgecombe
- ▶ Forsyth
- ▶ Gaston
- ▶ Graham
- ▶ Guilford
- ▶ Haywood
- ▶ Henderson
- ▶ Hoke
- ▶ Jackson
- ▶ Johnston
- ▶ Macon
- ▶ Mecklenburg
- ▶ Mitchell
- ▶ Montgomery
- ▶ Moore
- ▶ Nash
- ▶ New Hanover
- ▶ Onslow
- ▶ Orange
- ▶ Perquimans
- ▶ Pitt
- ▶ Randolph
- ▶ Richmond
- ▶ Robeson
- ▶ Rockingham
- ▶ Rowan
- ▶ Stokes
- ▶ Swain
- ▶ Transylvania
- ▶ Union
- ▶ Wake
- ▶ Wilkes
- ▶ Yadkin
- ▶ Yancey





# OUR 2018 IMPACT

"NCECF has helped people see early childhood as a system and not individual departments, agencies or agendas. It has broadened collaborative relationships in our community around shared strategies."

— Pam Dowdy, Wake County Smart Start





# WE PROMOTE UNDERSTANDING

We grew support for investment in early childhood.

Our 2018 voter poll showed strong support for investments in early childhood:

- ▶ **80% OF VOTERS SUPPORT DOUBLING THE STATE'S INVESTMENT IN EARLY EDUCATION**—from one percent of the General Fund budget to two percent. Republicans, Independents and Democrats alike favor a wide range of state investments in young children's healthy development beginning at birth to ensure their success in school and life.
- ▶ **80% OF NORTH CAROLINA VOTERS** say early education should be a higher priority than reducing business taxes in the state. Majorities across all parties agree.

We supported working parents and their children.

Through Family Forward NC, we began working with employers across the state to increase access to family-friendly workplace practices that are good for business and have positive health and well-being outcomes for children and families.

- ▶ **1,000 NC EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES** were engaged to gather feedback on employers' motivations behind the family-friendly practices they currently offer, the ones they want to offer and the barriers to offering them. Data gathered from employers and employees informed our Guide to Family Forward Workplaces, a resource for employers about family-friendly benefits that are good for business and good for child health and well-being.

To reach employers and employees from businesses of all sizes and from a variety of industries and regions of the state, we:

- Exhibited at events hosted by the NC Chamber of Commerce, NCWorks and the NC Society for Human Resource Management
- Hosted roundtables with Chambers of Commerce in Asheville, Wilmington, Rocky Mount and Robeson County
- Spoke to Smart Start executive directors about Family Forward NC
- Created an Advisory Council of 12 business and community leaders from the NC Department of Health and Human Services, early childhood organizations, healthcare providers and prominent NC employers such as Lowe's and Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina

We encouraged summer learning.

Our summer learning toolkit made it easy for program providers to effectively communicate with parents about the importance of keeping their children learning all summer long.

- ▶ **MORE THAN 1,000 PEOPLE ACCESSED OUR PARENT-INFORMED SUMMER LEARNING TOOLKIT** which helps camp counselors, librarians and faith leaders share why it's important to keep children learning all summer long.
- ▶ **10,150 CHILDREN ATTENDED PROGRAMS THAT USED THE SUMMER LEARNING TOOLKIT.** On a post-summer survey, all responding programs said they found the toolkit helpful and would use it again next year.
- ▶ **JULY 12 WAS PROCLAIMED TO BE SUMMER LEARNING DAY** thanks to joint efforts with the Governor's office.



# WE SPEARHEAD COLLABORATION

We developed an Aligned Action Framework to support child and family well-being.

We worked with our NC Pathways to Grade Level Reading partners across the state—including Design Teams composed of cross-sector content experts, data experts, policy thinkers and family representatives—to finalize recommended strategies for action around three areas of focus: children’s social-emotional health, high quality birth-to-eight early care and education, and regular school attendance. Pathways Design Teams co-created an Action Framework, which Pathways partners approved.

## ► OUR PATHWAYS DESIGN TEAMS USED A RACIAL EQUITY LENS

in co-creating the Action Framework. They considered input from:

- Local providers of services for children and families in 14 communities across the state
- A meta-analysis of more than 2,000 parent voices from around the state
- National research on what moves the needle in the priority areas, specifically for children of color

## ► PATHWAYS HAS IMPROVED COLLABORATION AMONG EARLY CHILDHOOD INITIATIVES IN NORTH CAROLINA,

facilitating use of shared measures and alignment of policy actions. Pathways work is featured as part of:

- The NC Early Childhood Action Plan
- The B-3rd Interagency Council
- The Governor’s Early Childhood Advisory Council
- The Leandro Commission Early Childhood/Whole Child Workgroup
- myFutureNC
- Think Babies NC
- Essentials For Childhood
- The Institute for Emerging Issues focus on early childhood

We also helped local organizations align their work with the Pathways framework and presented Pathways at local, state and national conferences.

And together with the Institute for Child Success, we co-produced “What Works for Third Grade Reading,” in collaboration with BEST NC. “What Works for Third Grade Reading” is a collection of 12 working papers that address whole-child, birth-to-eight factors that support children’s optimal development and improve reading proficiency.

We promoted local financing for early learning.

We continued our work to support NC communities in pursuing local investments for early childhood.

► **COMMUNITY LEADERS FROM SIX COUNTIES** have participated in our Local Financing for Early Learning Community Leadership Training and are active participants in a learning community that NCECF hosts. The learning community has provided a facilitated space for partners to learn from each other as they work to grow local funding for early learning programs.

In 2018, we also:

- Led a workshop on local financing for early education at the national Smart Start conference
- Published new case studies on local communities electing to locally fund early learning
- Shared local studies and reports among communities and hosted regular conference calls to facilitate peer-to-peer learning and collaboration

# WE ADVANCE POLICIES

We incorporated early childhood into local district plans for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

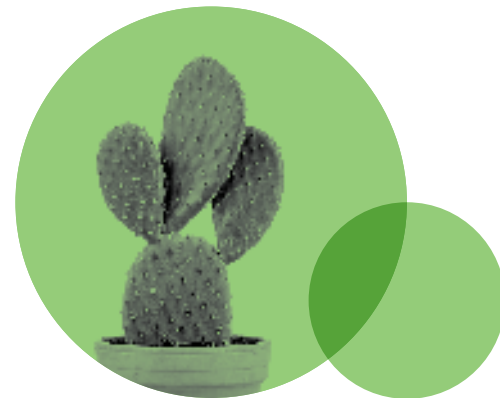
Our work to help local school districts incorporate early learning components into their ESSA plans created new relationships and supported collaboration among local early learning partners.

- ▶ **80 LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICT TEAMS (380 PEOPLE) ATTENDED REGIONAL MEETINGS** and developed birth-to-eight commitments.
- ▶ **95 PERCENT** said that attending the regional meeting impacted their work.
- ▶ **86 PERCENT** said that their ESSA plan would include birth-to-eight strategies.
- ▶ **71 PERCENT** said that their team was working to implement the commitments identified at the regional meeting.

"This was a valuable time of discussion and collaboration from stakeholders in our district to invest in the development and education of children."

— Katherine Morris, Teacher, Craven County Schools

"This was a great starting point, as we learned that we have many of the same goals for the children in our communities!" — Anabel Melgar, Preschool Coordinator, Smart Start of Davidson County



We tackled chronic absence in schools.

We incorporated chronic absence as a primary strategy for the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading and as a prioritized area of focus for the Pathways to Grade-Level Reading Action Framework. In collaboration with Campaign for Grade-Level Reading communities, Pathways Design Team members and local school districts from throughout North Carolina, we:

- Supported local action on chronic absence by hosting a strategy session with national partner Attendance Works, creating a toolkit on how communities can promote attendance and working with the Governor's office to declare September "Attendance Awareness Month"
  - Surveyed local school districts across the state and continued our AttendaNCe Counts series with a new issue brief examining local school districts' policies on chronic absence, best practices and case studies of NC communities making change
  - Collected and considered hundreds of strategies for supporting regular school attendance that were shared by parents, local communities and policy experts and informed by research on what moves the needle on regular attendance, particularly for children and families of color—prioritized strategies were included in the Pathways Action Framework
- ▶ **NC DEFINED CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM.** In February, the NC State Board of Education established the state's first-ever standard definition of chronic absenteeism, in line with guidance shared by NCECF.
  - ▶ **55 LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS** shared their attendance policies to contribute to a broader understanding of how all districts can better support young children's regular school attendance.
  - ▶ **14 COMMUNITIES MET TO GIVE INPUT INTO THE LOCAL CAUSES OF CHRONIC ABSENCE** in their communities and strategies to improve it. We learned that the reasons for chronic absence vary from county to county, and include factors that range far beyond the school walls—like children's access to health care and transportation. It's a community-wide problem that demands community-wide solutions.



## We're building better systems for babies and toddlers.

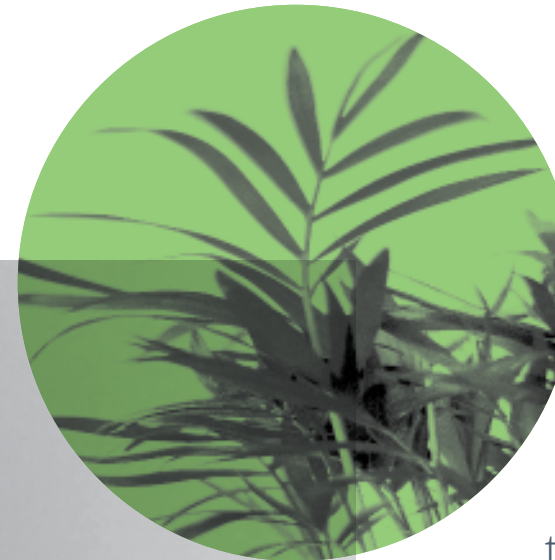
We helped establish and grow the Think Babies™ NC initiative, through supporting:

- The creation of a Leadership Team to guide the initiative's work
- A collaborative process to select Think Babies™ NC policy priorities using the Pathways to Grade-Level Reading work as a foundation
- Communications and messaging around the importance of improving policies and investing in babies and toddlers

► **2 NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**—Pritzker Children's Initiative and ZERO TO THREE—invested in North Carolina's babies and toddlers, because of our state's history of prioritizing early childhood and collaborating to improve young children's outcomes.

► **20 PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS COLLABORATED** to form the Think Babies NC Leadership Team, share common messaging on babies and toddlers and advance the policy priorities.

► **8 ACTIONABLE, IMPACTFUL POLICY PRIORITIES** were chosen by the Think Babies NC Leadership Team to support babies' and toddlers' health and development, support their families and communities and ensure their access to high-quality early learning environments.



"Pathways has piqued the interest of partners that otherwise have not been as fully engaged with early childhood initiatives."

— Alexander County Partnership for Children

"We have been in partnership with the North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation to ensure that all of our students across the state, regardless of where they live, their socioeconomic status or the color of their skin, can move through our education system and find success at the other end. It's been an honor to work with the North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation and align with the Pathways work. We are a strong supporter." — Kristy Teskey, myFutureNC



# JOIN US

Together, we can realize greater outcomes for young children than any of us can produce on our own.

## **STAY UP TO DATE ON EARLY LEARNING DEVELOPMENTS**

<https://mailchi.mp/buildthefoundation/newsletter>

## **PARTICIPATE IN OUR WEBINARS**

Archived webinars and other videos available at: [www.youtube.com/buildthefoundation](http://www.youtube.com/buildthefoundation)

**PARTNER WITH US** to host a business-focused Family Forward NC presentation and discussion. Email: [ncecf@buildthefoundation.org](mailto:ncecf@buildthefoundation.org)

## **BECOME A PATHWAYS PARTNER**

[www.buildthefoundation.org/pathways-partners/](http://www.buildthefoundation.org/pathways-partners/)

## **ACCESS OUR REPORTS AND RESOURCES**

[www.buildthefoundation.org](http://www.buildthefoundation.org)

## **JOIN THE NC CAMPAIGN FOR GRADE-LEVEL READING**

We're 14 communities strong and growing! Find out more at:

<https://buildthefoundation.org/initiative/campaign-for-grade-level-reading/>

## **FOLLOW US**

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[#bthru8Pathways](https://twitter.com/bthru8Pathways) [#PathwaysRipple](https://twitter.com/PathwaysRipple)





Over the past five years, we have created collaborative relationships and engaged stakeholders in meaningful work that has moved the needle for children and families.

In 2018 alone:

- Our Facebook followers grew by 22 percent, and our Twitter followers grew by 49 percent
- 96 percent of survey respondents at the 2018 Pathways Partners stakeholders meeting ranked the meeting a 4 or 5: “well worth my time”
- 95 percent of local education agencies that attended our regional ESSA meetings said attending the meeting impacted their work, and 86 percent said that their ESSA plan would include birth through eight strategies
- Investments in NCECF increased by nearly a third from 2017 to 2018

## OUR DONORS

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.

- Alliance for Early Success
- The Belk Foundation
- Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina
- Book Harvest
- ChildTrust
- The Duke Endowment
- The Goodnight Educational Foundation
- The InSight Fund of the Triangle Community Foundation
- NC Department of Public Instruction
- NC Institute of Medicine
- Oak Foundation
- JB & MK Pritzker Family Foundation
- Skeebo Foundation
- State Library of NC
- The Triangle Community Foundation
- United Way of the Greater Triangle
- Wells Fargo
- Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation
- Individual Contributors



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Together, we can achieve a bold vision: a strong foundation for lifelong health, education and well-being for each child in North Carolina, supported by a premier birth-to-eight system.

**PROMOTING**  
UNDERSTANDING

**SPEARHEADING**  
COLLABORATION

**ADVANCING**  
POLICIES



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