NC Pathways to Grade-Level Reading
Data Action Team
Meeting Four Summary Report

The NC Pathways to Grade-Level Reading Data Action Team met for the fourth and last time on April 28th from 10 am-2 pm at RTI International in Research Triangle Park.

All of the materials and presentations shared at the meeting are online at http://buildthefoundation.org/data-action-team/.

Purpose of the Data Action Team
The Data Action Team was co-convened by the North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation, NC Child, The North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc., and excelleNCe (an initiative of BEST NC) to identify and recommend – in collaboration with the larger Stakeholder Group – a set of population-level measures of success that impact third grade reading success. These measures will be whole-child, begin at birth, and align with the goals in Lisbeth Schorr's *Pathway to Children Ready for School and Succeeding at Third Grade*.

The Data Action Team has engaged in a landscape survey of existing national birth-to-eight indicators and indicators being used by NC state-level organizations and selected a limited number of measures of success that best suit NC's context based on our state's strengths and needs. The Stakeholder Group has been kept abreast of the Data Action Team's work, and their feedback has been solicited on a regular basis as the Data Action Team has moved through the process of selecting the measures of success.

Data Action Team Membership
As defined by the shared Data Action Team Description, Data Action Team members include early childhood experts from inside and outside state government, academia, service providers and parents, and represented the Health, Family/Community, and Education sectors. It is a phenomenal group! *See Appendix A for a list of the Data Action Team members.*

Data Action Team Meeting Four Summary

Welcome and Reminder of the Data Action Team Goals and Process
Mandy Ableidinger (NC Early Childhood Foundation consultant) started the meeting by welcoming the team and reminding everyone what had been accomplished so far, where we were in the process, and what was coming next.

Goals for the meeting included:
- Consider a proposed framework for the indicators to communicate the work to a broader audience.

- Work with indicators within that framework to ensure that the story we are telling is cogent, complete and concise.
- Work in cross-goal groups to ensure that the overall story we are telling - about how these indicators, these outcomes and these goals impact third-grade reading proficiency - is sufficient.
- Think about what needs to be communicated about the work to the stakeholder group at the May 20th summit.

Goals for the May 20th Stakeholder Summit include:
- Adopt a shared framework for promoting and guiding state level efforts to improve third grade reading proficiency.
- Prioritize indicators to measure progress and inform strategic efforts.
- Launch teams to design strategies around indicators.

Integrating the Pathways Work into Ongoing Initiatives

The NC Early Childhood Foundation and partners are hearing from more and more agencies interested in the Data Action Team's work. We highlighted two examples where the Data Action Team's indicators will be used in ongoing initiatives:
- The Essentials for Childhood initiative, led by the Division of Public Health, will adopt the measures as their child well-being indicators. It's even in their new RFP!
- The North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc. will use the measures to inform a revision of the Smart Start Performance Based Incentive System indicators that are used statewide.

Stakeholder Group Feedback

We highlighted the results of a stakeholder group survey that ranked the indicators within each goal area and gave stakeholders an opportunity to comment on the indicators and the process.
- 113 stakeholders from across the spectrum of health and development, early education, K-12 education, and family support gave feedback! That is a great response, which suggests that the work is picking up steam across the state and across sectors.
- Some survey respondents left individual comments that were great fodder for conversation and molded the meeting going forward. Just a few:
  - "WOW!! Ranking these is hard! I want to give out a bunch of 'ties'!"
  - "Strength-based indicators will help people have a more positive frame and focus on what we want to achieve."
  - "The indicators do not seem to exclusively relate to the goal area."
- We noted that the indicators received strong support across the board – there were very few outliers in terms of what stakeholders thought were important. That told us that the Data Action Team is on the right track – choosing critical indicators that move our top-line result of early literacy.

Considering the Proposed Framework

We presented an evolved version of the indicator framework. This framework is intended to help move the Pathways work from a data indicator discussion to the next step – a change process. The framework lays out two different "layers" of indicators for each outcome.

- The first layer comprises **measurement indicators** – how can we know if we have achieved this outcome?
- The second layer comprises **influencing indicators** – what has research shown moves the needle on this outcome?

By organizing the indicators into this logical framework, team members began to see "strands" emerging from the work. **Influence indicators** move the needle on **measurement indicators** that measure **outcomes**, which in turn move the needle on the **goals**, which impact our **top-line result**: third-grade reading proficiency.

Data Action Team members paired up to discuss the following two questions about the evolved indicator framework:

- What do you observe when you look across all three goals?
- What opportunities does this evolved format provide in helping us communicate your work to a larger audience?

In the whole-group discussion that followed, members expressed support for the concept of the framework and appreciated how it moved their work towards action. They mentioned that the framework made it easier for someone unfamiliar with all the data indicators to gain a better overall understanding of their work. They shared some critiques about the layout and formatting of the framework, which have since been incorporated.

Goal Group Work: Cogent, Concise and Complete

Team members then sat with their goal groups to work through the frameworks, ensuring that each framework was:

- Cogent - does it hang together?
- Complete - are the indicators there that need to be there?
- Concise - are there extraneous indicators that aren't needed?

Working on a wall with large sticky notes, each goal group thought through the logical framework of the indicators and outcomes for their respective goals, re-arranged and re-wrote indicators as needed, and re-created an edited framework on the wall. Only indicators that are research-based to impact early literacy were added, and indicators that seemed unnecessary or repetitive were removed.

In addition to ensuring that the framework was cogent, concise and complete, each group also was asked consider the NC data they had collected on their indicators to note:

- Where is NC struggling?
- Where is NC excelling?

- What indicators should be highlighted as impacting our equity principle? (i.e., indicators that highlight a racial or socioeconomic gap that needs to be addressed)

Finally, the goal groups noted which indicators are not currently tracked in NC and marked them for the Data Development Agenda.

The goal teams were very engaged in this work and, leveraging their extensive data and research expertise about how the various indicators impact early literacy, they worked through lunch to make important changes to the structures of the frameworks.

Cross-Goal Work: Highlighting Connections
After the goal groups were happy with their edited frameworks, the new versions were hung up beside each other, taking up a whole wall of windows. We took a moment to admire the great work that had gotten us to that point.

The team took this opportunity to look at the framework as a whole. They noted that the framework is not comprehensive – there are always more influencers that could be added – but that it effectively outlines research-based pathways to grade-level reading. They moved a couple indicators to different spots in the framework, and noted that since many of the indicators influence each other, and influence *other* outcomes and goals, there is no perfect way to arrange them in the framework. This observation led into the next exercise.

Team members were given string, scissors and tape and asked to make physical connections between indicators that moved the needle on *other* outcomes besides the ones they were currently under. This was a fun and chaotic exercise, and by the end, the new frameworks were completely webbed with string. The team then had a conversation about the importance of noting those indicators that have cross-outcome and cross-goal impact, since those are the indicators that might give us the biggest impact. The web of string was a tactile representation of the importance of remembering that all these indicators, outcomes and goals interact and cannot be siloed, just as the parts of a child's life – his health, his family, his school, his community – cannot be siloed but should be viewed as intersecting and interdependent parts of a whole.

Finally, team members were asked to call out observations about the framework and the connections they had made across indicators, outcomes and goals. The group noted that three conditions seemed to undergird everything in the framework, across all three goals: poverty, racial inequities, and social-emotional needs. They decided to highlight those three conditions underneath the influencing indicators, along the bottom of the framework.

The three final frameworks are available online at http://buildthefoundation.org/data-action-team/.

Planning for the May 20th Stakeholder Summit

The team wrapped up the day by answering the question: What do you think attendees at the stakeholder summit will want to know about your work on the Data Action Team? Responses included:

- How did you choose the indicators? What criteria did you use to winnow them down?
- How are these indicators related to third-grade reading? Which are most strongly related?
- What will make the most difference/biggest impact?
- How did you get to this framework?
- Is this comprehensive/ all-inclusive?
- Who was in the room?

- What data do we need going forward? How will we get that data?
- Do we need to measure them all? Are any highly correlated?
- So what now?
- Who is responsible for what's next?
- How will you ensure that the work is sustainable going forward?

They are all great questions and will be used to help structure the May 20th stakeholder summit.

Celebration Time!

The team finished off the Data Action Team process with a little celebration! We played a little Kool and the Gang ("Celebration time, come on!") and passed out smarties candies to our Data Action Team smarties. The team left pleased with their work and excited about next steps.

The Meeting 4 presentation is online [here](#).

Next Steps for the NC Pathways to Grade-Level Reading Initiative

The goal of the NC Pathways to Grade-Level Reading Project is to create partnerships among the state's early learning and education, public agency, policy, philanthropic and business leaders to define a common vision, shared measures of success and coordinated strategies that support children's optimal development beginning at birth.

After the Data Action Team develops the measures of success, next steps for the project include:
- Disaggregating the data for each priority measure of success.
- Understanding the needs of those who shape children's early environments.
- Identifying immediate ways to support alignment and progress on the measures of success.
- Developing a results-based action plan.
- Promoting best practice and policy to advance the measures of success.
- Measuring progress.

Appendix A: Data Action Team Members

Gary Ander, NC Infant Mental Health Association
Laila Bell, NC Child
Jessica Murrell Berryman, Parent Representative and Business Owner, Lango Kids RTP
Anna Carter, Child Care Services Association
KC Elander, Department of Public Instruction
Kelly Evans, Duke Center for Child and Family Policy
Paula Henderson, SAS
Brisa Hernandez, Carolinas HealthCare System
Jennifer Johnson, NC Division of Child Development and Early Education
Sandy Johnson, Early Learning Teacher
Mary Jones, Principal, Bailey Elementary, Nash-Rocky Mount Schools
Jennifer Mattie, Parent Representative
Kelly Maxwell, Child Trends
Priscilla Jacobs Maynor, Ph.D., imaginED
Mark McDaniel, UNC Center for Community Capital
Karen Mills, Johnston County Partnership for Children
Tazra Mitchell, Budget and Tax Center, NC Justice Center
Nicole Gardner-Neblett, Ph.D., FPG Child Development Institute, UNC Chapel Hill
Amy Hawn Nelson, Ph.D., UNC Charlotte Urban Institute
Kristin O'Connor, NC Division of Social Services
Chris Payne, Ph.D., Center for Youth, Family, and Community Partnerships, UNC Greensboro
Ellen Peisner-Feinberg, Ph.D., FPG Child Development Institute, UNC Chapel Hill
Olivia Rice, RTI International
Katie Rosanbalm, Ph.D., Duke Center for Child and Family Policy
Meghan Shanahan, Ph.D., UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health
Terry Stoops, Ph.D., John Locke Foundation
Kim McCombs-Thornton, Ph.D., North Carolina Partnership for Children
Kathleen Jones Vessey, NC State Center for Health Statistics
Marvel Andrea Welch, Ph.D. Candidate in Public Health at Walden University