

Design Team Meeting Six: Summary Report

On August 29, 2018, 42 participants attended a joint Design Team meeting to continue work on the NC Pathways to Grade-Level Reading (Pathways) Initiative. This meeting, held at Pullen Memorial Baptist Church, was the sixth and final meeting of the Pathways Design Team.

The Design Team has completed the third phase of the Pathways work. The team's goal has been to identify strategies for action to impact the areas prioritized by the [Pathways Partners](#).

The first two phases of Pathways involved:

- Identifying shared, birth-through-age-eight, whole child measures to put children on a pathway to grade-level reading.
- Determining how North Carolina's children are doing on those measures, in order to prioritize areas of focus to take action on first.

Background on Pathways is available [online](#).

Design Team members represent government agencies, nonprofit organizations, the private sector, foundations, and research institutions. Expertise spans health, family support, community engagement, early learning environments, and K-12 education.

This report shares a high-level summary of the content of the discussions and work that took place during the meeting.



The agenda for the meeting (Appendix A) included:

- Welcome and Overview of the Day
- Grounding Ourselves in Equity
- Review and Discussion of the Proposed Pathways Action Framework
- Highlighting Community Conversation Input
- Transitioning to Implementation
- Gallery Walk
- Reflection, Next Steps and Evaluation

Details about each section of the agenda are provided below.

Welcome and Overview of the Day

Tracy Zimmerman, Executive Director of the North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation (NCECF), welcomed attendees to the meeting and reviewed the Pathways work that has been completed to date. She explained how the objectives of Meeting Six would help achieve the purpose of the Design Team phase of the Pathways work – to create policy, practice and capacity-building agendas for the prioritized areas of focus that will make progress toward the top line result of all children reading on grade level by the end of third grade.

An overview of the meeting arc for the six Design Team meetings was shared:

- **Meeting One** was solutions-oriented. Participants identified what current North Carolina policies and practices to keep, change, create or chuck to see improved outcomes for children and families.
- **Meeting Two** focused on learning a racial equity framework, establishing a racial equity lens for the work, and thinking about root causes from an equity angle to inform solutions.
- **Meeting Three** was part of what design thinkers describe as “the messy middle.” Design Team members looked at the true complexity of bringing together the work on racial equity with input from parents, community providers, and national research to inform cross-sector strategies that will equip all students with what they need to succeed. Criteria, grounded in the Pathways Principles, were developed to guide the group as they select strategies to pursue.
- **Meeting Four** shared findings from 13 Community Conversations from across the state. Design Team members used the Pathways criteria to identify top strategies for moving forward.

- **Meeting Five** focused on Design Team members creating and coming to consensus on proposals – defined as three to five tactics and a rationale – for each of the ten strategies identified in meeting four. Team members also began gathering input on what NC is already doing in the strategy areas.



- **Meeting Six** concluded the work of this phase of the Pathways initiative. Design Team members celebrated finding consensus on the Action Framework and began action planning for the implementation phase of the work.

Grounding Ourselves in Equity

Pathways is committed to using a racial equity lens in the work. To help honor that commitment, Sterling Freeman and Kathleen Crabbs of OpenSource Leadership Strategies (OSLS) were present at each Design Team meeting to help guide, challenge and encourage Design Team members to “keep the slippery fish of race on the table.” At meeting 5, Design Team members were invited to reflect on their engagement with the equity work through an evaluation. Sterling and Kathleen compiled results of the evaluations, and at Meeting 6 they offered observations about how Design Team members’ approach to equity shifted over time:

- While working directly with Design Team members on the technical aspects of using the racial equity lens, OSLS noted their development as a group.
- Design Team members consistently made it a practice to incorporate the language, tools and framework of the racial equity lens in all of their work around strategies and tactics.
- This allowed for deeper consideration of the issues they surfaced and slowed the pace of their work, which resulted in more thorough analysis.
- The question, “What does this have to do with race?” became the leading prompt to frame their discussions. By Meeting 4, it became a group norm for the Design Team to interrogate their process in this fashion.
- The racial equity lens became a primary assessment tool for prioritizing actions.
- The majority of Design Team members found great value in the “explicit, but not exclusive” focus on racial equity. It allowed for deeper, more complex, and more

thoughtful conversations. It also pushed them to think intentionally about the most vulnerable and amplify the experiences and voices of children and families who are often not heard.



As part of the evaluation process, Design Team members were asked to consider how they intend to use what they have learned

about the racial equity lens in their own work. Sterling and Kathleen shared some of the ways noted in the evaluation:

- Integrate it into strategic planning efforts of their own agencies.
- Interrogate the tools and materials they use in their work.
- Use the analysis to improve parent-teacher relationships.
- Use as a lens through which to assess partnership and organizational culture.
- Be intentional about how structural racism impacts outcomes.
- Use the racial equity framework with their own families as a way to raise conscientious kids.
- Use as a tool to keep themselves accountable in their work.

Reflecting on the Draft Racial Equity Statement

Given Pathways' commitment to racial equity, Design Team members were invited to share input on a draft Racial Equity Statement. In table groups, Design Team members identified what resonated about the draft statement as well as what they were wondering about. Results of these conversations are found in Appendix B: Reflections on the Draft Equity Statement. The Design Team decided to appoint a small racial equity committee of Design Team members to finalize the statement. That workgroup has since met, considered input from the Design Team meeting, provided their own input, and finalized the statement. It is available here as Appendix C.

Review and Discussion of the Proposed Pathways Action Framework

NCECF outlined the process of developing the draft Action Framework. There was work done between meetings 5 and 6 to translate the strategies and tactics prioritized by the Design Team into a public-facing document that Pathways will promote. Design Team members and Pathways Partners were invited to react to the updated version prior to meeting 6, and their input was incorporated into the draft.

Several themes emerged in the recommendations that resulted in changes as the Framework evolved:

- **Integrate the role of the physical health system more into the social-emotional health items.** Clarifying language was added into the framework, particularly around the role of pediatricians and family practitioners in delivering social-emotional health screenings and services.
- **Directly address the developmental milestones and the importance of evidence-based programs to move the skills that children need to build to learn to read on grade level.** A section will be included ahead of the Expectations and Actions that outlines the Developmental Milestones and the importance of evidence-based programs on reading instruction, family support around reading, etc. Pathways' rationale that these Actions will move the main areas of focus, which will move third grade reading, will also be included.
- **More directly address the needs of children with disabilities and their families.** The Pathways Partners and the Design Team have been clear that they support an equity lens that is explicitly, but not exclusively, focused on racial equity. So, race has been lifted up as the main focus. Other vulnerable groups – such as children in rural communities, in low-income families, or with disabilities – have also been discussed throughout the process, and many of the actions in the Framework will improve outcomes for them as well. It is Pathways' hope and expectation that as Pathways Partners begin implementing the Action Framework, more detailed action steps will be recommended that will address specific populations of children.
- **Deleted "Raise the minimum wage."** Out of all the policy ideas and the clear racial equity frame, this was the one specific item where consensus was not reached, among those Design Team members who responded to the survey. Since consensus wasn't reached, the decision was made to remove this Action item because:
 - The Design Team did not reach consensus around it.
 - While the other actions in the "reduce family stress" section are fairly broad, this one is very specific.
 - The research on it is inconclusive.

- This is a political “hot button” issue. The Framework has been developed to have broad political support and including a specific recommendation to raise the minimum wage could jeopardize that.
- All along, Pathways has been clear that this Framework would not represent all that is needed for children and families in NC. The Framework is the set of policy changes that will move the needle in the areas of focus, and on our ultimate goal, that this Design Team is recommending for action first.

A possible next step would be to convene a bi-partisan working group to consider possible family economic security policies and determine areas of common ground.

Highlighting Community Conversation Input

Design Team members were reminded that over the course of the last year, Pathways created a feedback loop with 14 communities across the state to get input on the Design Team’s work. At their first meetings, local providers of services for children and families shared what supports them and what gets in the way as they work to support children and families in the three areas of focus. That feedback was shared with Design Team members and incorporated into the matrix of strategy options being considered by the Team. During the second round of Community Conversations, providers reacted to the matrix of strategy options, prioritizing a subset of strategies for action that they thought would best move the needle in their communities. That feedback was brought back to Design Team members who used it to help prioritize strategies. The draft Action Framework reflects many of the priorities recommended by those communities. Just a few examples include:

- Authentically engage with parents.
- Recruit, professionally prepare and retain a well-qualified workforce.
- Ensure affordable high quality early care and education.
- Address social-emotional health and learning in schools.
- Infuse early childhood mental health competencies throughout the family and child serving systems.

Getting to Consensus on the Action Framework

Design Team members indicated unanimous support for Pathways Action Framework (Appendix D). The Team celebrated with cupcakes!

Transitioning to Implementation

Design Team members were asked to personally reflect in writing on the use of the Action Framework moving forward:

- How could you imagine using this Framework?
- What is one immediate action you or your organization could take?

Across sectors, Design Team members noted they could imagine using the Pathways Action Framework to:

- Inform organizational agendas and strategic plans.
- Provide benchmarks as an assessment tool, reference and/or checklist.
- Build out professional development and training.
- Promote family engagement.
- Raise awareness and educate.
- Organize policy agendas.
- Infuse and implement a racial equity lens and tools into their own work.
- Gain additional support and new partners.

For a complete listing of cross-sector themes regarding using the Action Framework, please see Appendix E.

Kicking off Implementation

In order to provide context around next steps for implementation, Design Team members were briefed on elements already in motion. Given the breadth and diversity of Pathways Partners who span all child and family systems, many organizations and agencies will take pieces of the Framework to implement. Some organizations have already indicated that they are ready to implement aspects of the Action Framework:

- NC Child has applied for funding to start implementing the social-emotional health pieces.
- NCPC is in an early exploration phase of some work around community resilience that could touch pieces of the agenda.
- NCECF is working to raise funding to convene a Policy and Practice Action Team to identify and apply pressure points for Pathways implementation.
- Pathways also aims to convene a Data Advisory Council of state leaders to improve the quality of data available and identify definitions and data collection approaches for Pathways measures that are not currently collected. This effort will prioritize accessing disaggregated data, so that policies and practices focus on achieving equitable outcomes. The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) is using the shared

measures as the foundation for the state's Early Childhood Action Plan. They are looking to NCECF to continue to lead and convene on data advocacy.

Beginning Action Planning

Design Team members worked in small groups on the individual actions to:

- Note whether there was a clear equity lens already articulated in the actions.
- Brainstorm three to five actionable, precise and concrete first, or next, steps – along with their rationales – for each of the actions identified in the Framework.
- Determine target populations and primary actors for each of the steps proposed.

For a complete listing of the initial action planning worksheets, please see Appendix F.

Gallery Walk

Small groups posted their action worksheets and Design Team members noted questions, clarifications or edits as they reviewed the work of their colleagues. Please see Appendix F for the results of the small groups, as well as Design Team members' feedback.

Next Steps

Mandy Ableidinger, Policy and Practice Director at North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation, previewed what will be shared with Design Team members before the October 18th Pathways stakeholder meeting:

1. The Action Framework, after the Review Committee has done its work.
2. The next/first steps for action areas completed in the meeting.
3. An evaluation and meeting summary.

In addition, an evaluation of the year-long Design Team process will be distributed.

Appreciations

Tracy thanked Design Team members for their commitment to the process and celebrated the positive outcomes that have been accomplished. She extended appreciation for each staff person and consultant who contributed along the way.

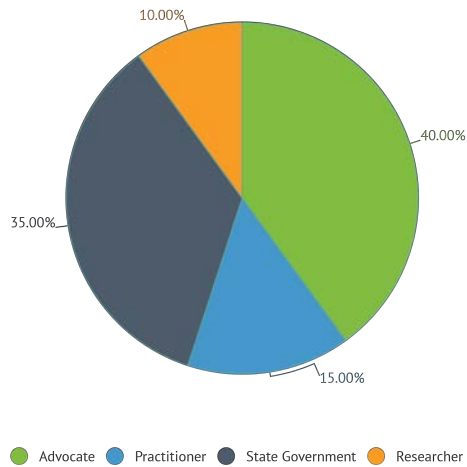
Evaluation

Participants were encouraged to complete an evaluation of the meeting. High-level themes from the meeting evaluations are below (the full evaluation report is available online). Sixty-two percent (62%) of the 42 participants who attended the meeting responded to the evaluation.

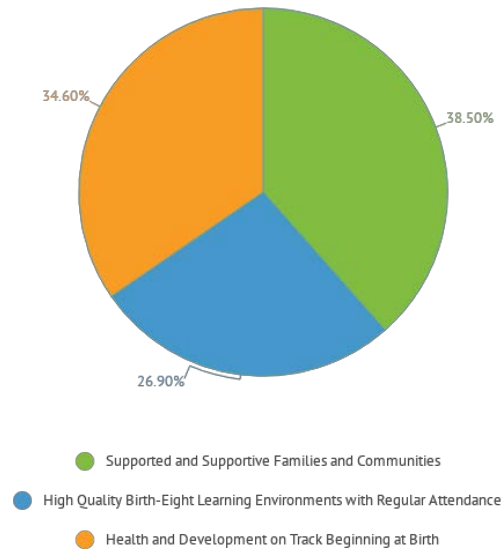
Participants used the following four-point scale to answer questions related to the meeting's outcomes, engagement, and execution: Strongly Agree [4], Agree [3], Disagree [2], Strongly Disagree [1]. The results are presented below:

Session feedback summary table			
		Average score	Percent 3 or 4
Outcomes	Overall	3.7	99%
	The objectives and intended outcomes of the meeting were clearly defined	3.7	100%
	We achieved the planned objectives and intended outcomes of this meeting.	3.6	100%
	The work of this meeting was valuable and worth my time.	3.8	96%
	The Design Team had the resources (e.g., organization, community, leadership, talent, time) necessary to meet the goals of this meeting.	3.7	100%
	I feel that this Design Team is engaging in work that, if implemented, would improve third grade reading outcomes for NC's children.	3.8	100%
Engagement	Overall	3.7	99%
	Members of our team were prepared and engaged.	3.7	96%
	I feel my voice was heard during this meeting.	3.8	100%
	I believe I have a valued role in shaping this work.	3.7	100%
Execution	Overall	3.7	97%
	The meeting was well-planned and executed.	3.7	100%
	Time was used effectively and efficiently.	3.6	96%
	All follow-actions and next steps are clear.	3.7	96%

Which of these roles best describe you?



Which Pathways Goal do you work in/interact with most often?



Participants also offered valuable comments in the open response portion of the evaluation. A sampling of those responses follows:

WHAT WAS THE MOST VALUABLE PART OF THIS MEETING?

- Working in small groups on action steps.
- The conversations and seeing the framework finalized.
- Transitioning to implementation.
- Networking – meeting new colleagues.
- Collective learning and exchange of ideas as we developed recommendations.
- Pre- and post-meeting materials for members were excellent.
- Racial equity piece.
- Final agreement on the Framework.

WHAT DID WE DO WELL THAT WE SHOULD CONTINUE TO DO IN FUTURE MEETINGS?

- Clear direction, worksheets and instructions.
- Organization and flexibility.
- Appreciate individual contributions.
- Always well organized and facilitates engagement.
- Providing time for people to dig into the work.
- Chances to unpack ideas and share thinking.
- Good combination of didactic and interactive.
- Bringing together a diverse group.
- Please allow us to stay involved.

WHAT SUGGESTIONS DO YOU HAVE FOR WHAT WE CAN CHANGE OR HOW WE CAN IMPROVE?

- Really amazing process to be part of.
- This committee may be the most satisfying one I've ever worked on, from structure to recommendations. I haven't always agreed with every focus, but I've grown with this work and feel the recommendations would be effective if implemented.
- Please continue to provide notes from all the work that was done today with the group.
- Perhaps include a couple of smaller regionally based work group sessions that will be used to compile at the whole group meetings.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Based on the results of these evaluations and participant feedback, we recommend that Pathways staff continue to build on the investment and commitment of Design Team members by engaging them in implementing the work of Pathways moving forward.