

High Quality Birth to Eight Care and Education Design Team

Work group: Access to quality and affordable early care and education

Children need access to high quality child care and education, many from birth. Affordable, high quality care allows parents to work and provide for their children's healthy growth and development. Preschool prepares children for elementary school, increasing the likelihood they will be reading on grade level by third grade.

Outcomes:

- Families pay 10% or less for high quality child care
- Eligible 4-yr olds attend NC Pre-k
- Eligible children under age 6 receiving child care subsidies

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.

Access to High Quality Early Care and Education

- NC has a strong quality rating and improvement system (stars) that has helped promote quality to parents and encourage increasing numbers of early care and education providers to achieve higher levels of quality for all children.

- There is data collection and reporting around disparities that exist in access to high quality care between infants/toddlers and preschoolers. (e.g., *Who's Caring for Our Babies* reports)
- A new study will be released in July that profiles equity of access to high quality early care and education for infants and toddlers in NC.
- Local communities are taking action to establish universal Pre-K (e.g., Buncombe, Durham, Forsyth)
- Early Head Start, Head Start, NC Pre-K, Smart Start and many 5-star child care centers provide high quality early care and education to vulnerable children across the state.
- NC Child Care Resource and Referral Council supports a strong child care resource and referral statewide system.
- The federal regulations for the Child Care and Development Block Grant offer some new options for states in terms of phasing out eligibility and creating copays during that period that NC should explore so that losing a voucher isn't a severe income cliff for families.
- Two reports from DCDEE were requested by the NCGA and delivered in February and March this year. One examines the cost of NC PreK classrooms and the other is on a possible "cost modeling" of the state's market rates. NC needs to create a more equitable market rate across its 100 counties that can also help lift provider wages and speaks to the true costs of providing high quality care.