



Community Conversations Full Report

March 2018

SECTION A: BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

About the Pathways to Grade-Level Reading Initiative

The Pathways vision is that *all North Carolina children, regardless of race, ethnicity or socioeconomic status, are reading on grade-level by the end of third grade, and all children with disabilities achieve expressive and receptive communication skills commensurate with their developmental ages, so that they have the greatest opportunity for life success.*

Pathways recognizes that literacy is rooted in birth-through-age-eight child development, and includes:

- Health and Development on Track Beginning at Birth
- Supported and Supportive Families and Communities
- High Quality Birth-through-Age-Eight Learning Environments, with Regular Attendance

Pathways is bringing 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. Each phase of the Pathways work has added people to the effort.



Phase 1 (Spring 2106)	Phase 2 (Fall 2016)	Phase 3 (2017-2018)	Phase 4 (2018 and beyond)
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 behind 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 are creating 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?	<i>Pathways will apply pressure to appropriate levers to advance the policy, practice, program and capacity-building agendas created by the Design Teams. Pathways will work to implement the recommendations through the state’s public, nonprofit and private sectors as appropriate.</i>

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

Design Teams

Pathways Design Teams are building strategies around key factors that impact third grade reading outcomes, including children’s social-emotional health, high quality birth-through-age-eight early care and education, and regular school attendance.

The purpose of the Design Teams is to create policy, practice and capacities agendas to advance the prioritized measures of success in North Carolina. What needs to change in our state to see shifts in the prioritized measures of success?

Pathways Criteria

The criteria are derived from the Pathways Principles that stakeholders established and that have guided the process since the beginning, and they will be used to prioritize Pathways' strategies for action.

Pathways Design Teams will prioritize strategies that:

- Address racial, ethnic, socioeconomic and ability inequities
- Are data- and research-driven and informed by developmental science
- Consider the whole child and family
- Are actionable and accountable
- Address a critical gap in our system

Community Conversations

To ensure that the Design Teams' work is grounded in the local realities across North Carolina, Pathways created a feedback loop between communities and the Design Teams. To garner input, Pathways worked with local partners to host meetings with local providers of services for young children and their families in 14 communities across the state.

This report documents the second of two conversations. At the first meeting, held in the fall of 2017, communities gave input about what supports their work and what gets in the way of their work to eliminate disparities and improve outcomes for children birth through age eight.

Pathways incorporated the input from the first round of Community Conversations, along with research, parent insights and the thinking of the state-level Pathways teams, into a set of strategy options for improving outcomes in the prioritized areas of focus. Design Teams are in the process of considering those options.

To inform the Design Teams' work, participants in the second round of Community Conversations were asked, based on their experience and the needs of their communities, which strategies Pathways should prioritize to reduce disparities and improve outcomes for children in the areas of:

- Social-Emotional Health and Development
- High Quality Early Care and Education
- Regular Attendance

The second round of Community Conversations were held between February 12 - March 14, 2018 across 13 North Carolina communities (one conversation was cancelled due to winter weather), reaching 291 participants. The recommendations from the 13 community conversations, including the prioritized strategies and the rationales, have been shared with the Pathways Design Teams to provide local input as they prioritize strategies for the state-level work.

Agenda for Community Conversations, Round Two

All Community Conversations held across the state used the same meeting agenda to provide consistency of input. Providers:

- Learned about progress on the Pathways initiative from state-level Pathways representatives.
- Reflected on the Pathways criteria to consider how they could result in a useful, workable set of policy, practice and capacity-building strategies for Pathways.
- Reacted to the matrix of possible strategies and tactics informed by the first round of Community Conversations, parent input, the Design Teams and national research.
- Recommended eight strategies for prioritization in each of the three areas of focus: Social-Emotional Health, High Quality Birth-through-Eight Education, and Regular School Attendance.

List of Participating Communities

Community	Date of conversation	Number of participants
Beaufort	2/12/2018	17
Bertie	3/8/2018	15
Blue Ridge	3/6/2018	14
Cabarrus	3/7/2018	11
Chowan/Perquimans	3/9/2018	12
Durham	3/10/2018	100
Forsyth	3/13/2018	17
New Hanover	3/6/2018	14
Onslow	3/2/2018	19
Orange	3/14/2018	19
Union	3/8/2018	18
Wake	3/6/2018	19
Watauga	Cancelled due to inclement weather	N/A
Yadkin	3/1/2018	16
<i>TOTAL</i>		291

SECTION B: OVERARCHING FEEDBACK

This section of the report seeks to capture high-level themes from the Community Conversations based on an analysis of the meeting summaries created by each local grantee. The examples bulleted below are direct quotes from the community reports.

Feedback on Pathways Criteria

In order to elicit input on the Pathways Criteria, community members discussed:

- *What is your interpretation of what the criteria mean?*
- *Why are these criteria important filters for choosing Pathways strategies?*
- *How do you think filtering strategies based on this set of criteria will result in a useful, workable set of policy, practice and capacity-building strategies for Pathways to move forward with?*

The following major themes emerged throughout the conversations about participants' reactions to the Pathways Criteria:

Criteria as a whole

- The criteria are like puzzle pieces; each needed to complete the full picture.
- Criteria allow you to see the whole picture and provide clear direction and reference points.
- Forces a deeper look to do something about the issues we are faced with.
- We're seeing how they're interconnected. If a child doesn't have one of the pieces, quality care can sometimes come in and substitute or help support the child in areas of need.
- Felt like they were self-explanatory.
- The criteria provide a filter for framing our work. Strategies that meet all five criteria will be sound. The criteria will help to solidify what supports are needed and what standards to expect. We also need to dig deeper into the root causes of many of the issues children and families face.

The whole child and family are foundational

- The framework is a foundation to our work. It is a whole child approach.
- Participants desire to see programs and services offered in [our county] use a "holistic approach and be multigenerational." This theme aligns with the criteria to "consider the whole child and family."
- We should be looking at the whole child and family needs.
- Support comprehensive filter for considering the needs of the whole child as driven by family voice.
- Whole child focus is very important.

- We need to increase and improve open communication with families served.
- Strategies should be family-centered and driven.

Criteria help identify critical gaps

- Another critical theme aligned with the criteria to “address a critical gap in our system.” Participants expressed the need for more support in the form of pre and postnatal care via home visits. “Many of the problems facing the 0-8 population start prior to birth.”
- This closes the gap and we should keep it closed. It forces focus and causes us to be intentional/purposeful.
- Strategies should address critical gaps that are specific to our community.
- The criterion should allow for identification of gaps and put supports in place to level the playing field.

Focusing on actionable and accountable increase likelihood for positive change

- Like that the criteria are actionable and accountable.
- Strategies should be actionable and measurable.
- We should be concerned with accountability. Who are we accountable to? What are the levels of accountability? Who is ultimately accountable for change?
- The Pathways project with the criteria will help agencies to move out of our silos, work together, and ensure that we are all on the same page. It is important that actions are doable.

Be aware of rural/urban divide

- Evidence-based programs/strategies can present problems, as often the models were not evaluated in rural areas. It is helpful to the extent that we can learn from other states that have implemented particular strategies/programs successfully.
- Actionable in an urban landscape is different from in a rural county. Because of increasing funding shortages for basic programs, rural counties may have one position for multiple job functions, where urban counties can hire multiple people for each discrete job.
- Making sure there is a distinction between metro and rural areas of the state.
- Is the design team diversified enough? [from the viewpoint of having enough rural representatives].

Equity focus is very important

- The focus on equity is key. This focus can help us determine our system measures and ultimately our impact. Even though we’ve had data, how we use that data to create impact is a new dimension of this work and it’s disrupting the process. However, to address racial, ethnic, socioeconomic and ability, it’s what we need. The criterion about

inequities is challenging because some strategies are system level changes and other are individual outcomes. Other criteria are more concrete.

- Equity is crucial as a lens, as our human tendency is to not honor differences.
- Participants believe it is critical for programs that are designed to provide high quality birth-through eight educational services that would support regular attendance be accessible, culturally responsive, inclusive and affordable. This theme aligns with the criteria of “addressing racial, ethnic, socioeconomic and ability inequities.”
- Some attendees expressed a tension between equity and inclusion.
- We need to ensure that we are focusing on the needs of ALL of the families in our communities.
- Consider all families and all children to eliminate assumptions about race, gender and abilities.

Data and research-driven have limitations

- Don't get too attached to research-based or evidence-based practices only.
- Data can be problematic. For rural counties, it's not always reflective of the actual landscape and can be inappropriately interpreted and used. With data as the single lens, the child can be forgotten.
- There are concerns about being overly research driven. What is the role of innovation if we end up only providing programs based on proven research?

Data-driven tools increase accountability

- Increase accountability by using data-driven tools to create better buy-in from both community resources and families served.
- The community is starting to realize that these impacts are affecting all communities. We need to continue to look at data and use it where we need the proof, if necessary.

Reactions to the Matrix of Strategy Options

Community members were shown a wall matrix of strategy and tactic options for addressing High Quality Birth-through-age-eight Education, Regular School Attendance, and Social-Emotional Health. They spent some time considering the matrix in a gallery walk, then reflected on the options by considering the questions:

- *What are your reactions to this wall of possibilities?*
- *What patterns do you see?*

The following major themes emerged throughout the conversations about participants' reactions to the matrix of strategy and tactic options:

Various reactions to the amount of information in the matrix

- Very comprehensive, good ideas.
- There were so many issues. Good to see how much organized thought had been put into the chart.
- Many large and grand ideas.
- Overwhelming number of choices.
- The matrix appeared complex with many ideas and thoughts and felt overwhelming to some.
- Too much information.

How do we make this do-able?

- We struggle with the fact that there are not a lot of concrete solutions in the lists. How do we move toward those kinds of solutions?
- Without basic needs of families being addressed, how do we get to support children? How do we focus on education? How much influence can the Pathways project really have on issues such as transportation, employment, health care, which are crucial issues for families and related to our outcomes? Where are our stakeholders in these areas and how do we bring them to the table to be a part of the solution?
- Amount of responsibility from providers/held more accountable.
- What can I do/how can I take action to move forward?

See interconnections in the matrix

- There was more repetition than was expected, which could mean there is more congruence in tactics than thought.
- How all the issues are interconnected (Education of teachers relates to compensation relates to retention).
- Everything is interconnected.

More parent input wanted

- Strong feeling that more parent voice needed to prioritize these strategies, give more input into them.
- Parent voice is missing.
- Are the messages being received by parents the way they are intended? Reading at grade level at third grade is a top priority for the professional community, but it may not be for our parents. How to be successful in life is the message, but how are parents receiving that message?
- Interests of parents need to be prioritized. How do we prioritize their voices? What is of interest to parents may not be of interest to teachers and administrators. For example, parents don't put the same importance on standards and testing; therefore, how do we bridge that gap?

- Some confusion about how the strategies go up there vs. a “vote” for this strategy from group that it was associated with – e.g. parents not associated with more minority teachers or redrawing boundary lines but given a chance parent might feel strongly about those types of strategies.

Focus on agreement across sectors

- Focus on strategies with four circles, representing agreement across sectors.
- Several areas had interest from all four sources of information (the colored dots): For everyone to be thinking the same thing, they must be pretty important (issues).
- Support for alignment of strategies for parent education and support as well as reduction in family stressors.

Can see our voice and needs represented

- Strategies reflect the criteria discussed and include some ideas generated by this group in the first meeting.
- This information addresses the needs of what we see in our community at the present time.

Diverse needs of urban and rural parts of the state

- Is any one strategy best for all parts of the state?
- Trends reflect an urban bias (Ex. Frequent use of the word ‘pediatrics’, when across two counties we have one pediatrician. Mention of transportation lines and buses in counties without either.)
- It is not ethnicity and race that divide families here [rural county], but socioeconomic status, religious views and suspicion of outsiders.

Combining mental and physical health reduces stigma

- It normalizes mental health to combine it with physical health.
- Reducing the stigma on mental health and further integration with primary health care is of extreme importance as we go forward in this process.

Patterns of note between different sectors

- See a pattern of the blue [research] and red [Design Team members] thoughts tend to match up and aren't always where the green [family] thoughts are. They don't completely line up. Research and government ideas align more than they align with those of parent and providers.
- Interesting that the parents' needs sometimes differ from policyholder ideas.

Notes for the Design Teams

Community members were asked if there was anything else they wanted the Design Teams to know. The themes that follow emerged throughout the conversations:

About the meeting and Pathways process

- Participants expressed gratitude for the opportunity to have input on the state's process.
- We appreciated the opportunity to come together with our different perspectives. It was interesting as we worked on picking our priority strategies how a different point of view made us see things in a different way.
- I felt that this process went so much more smoothly than the first meeting.
- These are ideas that we can live with and support, get behind and move forward.
- Use "eliminate" instead of "address" when referencing inequities.
- The needs are overwhelming, but it's encouraging to see so many entities trying to work together to meet these needs.

All strategies should include birth-through-third-grade actions

- There were several strategies with which the group would have agreed; however, the wording specifically noted "K-3" with birth to five left out, and we were uncomfortable with the exclusion.
- No focus on birth through age 3.
- Needs to include Birth through Third Grade and not just K-3 or K-12.

Focus on building equity competence

- Everyone should be trained in all fields about the importance of being culturally/linguistically equitable.
- Providers are not always respectful and are not culturally sensitive.
- Ensure that health care institutions are welcoming and respectful to people of difference races and ethnicities by providing culturally and linguistically competent staff, curriculum, and policies.

Focus on screening and trauma-informed care

- This should be combined with any screenings for families and children.
- Traumatic stress alters brain development and leads to substance abuse, etc.
- Support the inclusion of ACEs screening and trauma-informed care across governmental agencies at the state and county levels.

Some attendees expressed a tension between equity and inclusion

- Needs to include quality teachers and should ensure ALL students, reaching ALL students, not just students of color.
- Some strategies just reference Title I schools. We want high quality teachers for ALL children.
- Re-consider “vulnerable children” language – all children benefit from equitable supports.

[Pathways note: The Design Teams and the larger Pathways Partners stakeholder group determined through a collaborative process that equity, with an explicit but not exclusive focus on racial equity, is the primary lens for the Pathways work. Intentionally adapting policies and practices and investing resources where they can best support children and families who face the most obstacles to success will improve outcomes for all children.]

Make sure there is geographic diversity on Design Teams

- Our group was adamant about making sure that the Design Teams understood the importance of seeing us as the rural area that we are and that these strategies work very differently here in our part of the state than they do in the mid to central part of the state. We are a rural, farming, coastal community and it is very unique. Some concern was expressed that the Design Teams are not diversified enough to represent our area. The group asked the Pathways representative to please take this back to the Design team – we would like to see representation from our area on the Design Teams.

SECTION C: TOP STRATEGIES FROM COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

Community Conversation participants were asked to prioritize the eight strategies that they thought were most important to move outcomes in each of the three areas of focus:

- Social-Emotional Health and Development
- High Quality Early Care and Education
- Regular Attendance

Participants were asked to consider the Pathways Criteria and their own experience in their communities. All communities indicated they were able to come to consensus on their top strategies.

This section outlines the top strategies prioritized across the 13 communities. Also presented are syntheses of the rationales participants shared about why each strategy was prioritized, along with examples of comments from the communities. Communities are listed in the order in which their conversations occurred. The number of top strategies prioritized in each of the three areas varies from seven to nine due to ties.

Social-Emotional Health Strategies Prioritized by Local Communities

The following nine strategies related to social-emotional health were regarded as most important in the Community Conversations. These are in priority order.

1. Promote public awareness of the impact of early experiences on success in school and life. **Emphasize the importance of social-emotional development** for children to succeed in school, be healthy, and enjoy financial stability in adulthood. (11/13 Community Conversations chose this strategy.)

Synthesis of Rationales: Information is power. The more parents, families, teachers, and other service providers know and understand about trauma, ACEs, social-emotional health, and the importance of the early years, the more we can advocate for preventive strategies, and the more children will benefit. Promoting public awareness effectively means approaching parents in a non-threatening way, having honest and open communication, and taking responsibility for problems and solutions as a whole community. The things that happen to you as a child color the rest of your life and everyone who works with children and families needs to understand that.

Rationales:

Comments from Community Conversations:

- Need to do this in interaction with parents in a way they are not intimidated; no self-regulation: no learning.

- The more people know about the importance of early education, the more they can do. When it can be addressed early then that is better to be on the “Pro” side than corrective side.
- Quality education develops a more confident student; families who are well informed can advocate.
- All children will benefit when caregivers (teachers and parents) understand the impact of early experiences on development through public awareness efforts. Public awareness may have an impact on future teachers and parents.
- Gives people opportunity to talk about things that make them uncomfortable so they can be comfortable moving forward. Need to admit there is a problem and the responsibility is shared by the community, parents, and teachers.
- People are powerless without information; the effects of traumatic experiences are not commonly held presently; social marketing research could help determine effective strategies.
- Increase trauma-informed knowledge among both providers and parents.
- Health data and ACE’s feed the awareness and importance of social-emotional development, thus ensuring the continued success in school and life.
- This ties directly back to where health services are provided and make service more convenient. The things that happen to you as a child really do color how you approach the rest of your life.
- The matrix [of possibilities] highlights parents’ request for parent education. Parents want their children to be successful, but they may not understand the importance of daily attendance or the social emotional needs of their child.

2. Integrate mental health, physical health and primary care, including using patient-centered medical homes. 10/13

Synthesis of Rationales: Our current health care system is fragmented and mental health is often separated from physical health. Integrating mental health, physical health and primary care would address the needs of children in a holistic way and be more efficient for families. Furthermore, families are often already comfortable with their primary care providers, and integrating services would benefit families by reducing stigma, increasing the possibility of follow up and reducing transportation issues.

Rationales:

- Expanded screening and ones that are valid for minorities and that identify family risk factors (and you get a few other strategies rolled into one).
- Anytime you can integrate you can take care of a lot of things at one time.
- Anything we can do to reduce barriers is important.
- Integrating takes care of physical health and could identify a mental health concern.
- Mental health should not be looked at as separate and all children/people should have access.

- This addresses the whole child at one time and increases the opportunity to be screened and receive services in one location, reducing transportation issues.
- One stop shop supports families and is consistent with whole child/family approach; reduces mental health stigma; financial incentives for families.
- Integration of care would provide holistic care for children. Families are comfortable with their primary care provider reducing stigma and increase follow-through.
- Mental health, physical health and primary care, along with using a collaborative care model within child serving systems, ensures that attention to early childhood mental health is infused throughout.
- We selected these because our current health care is very fragmented and it is very difficult for parents to access the child's care in a convenient way.
- This strategy meets several Pathways criteria: considers the whole child and family, is actionable and accountable, are data and research driven and informed by developmental science.
- Social, physical, mental needs are all important: quality healthcare drives the quality of life that we expect for all.

3. Address social-emotional health and social-emotional learning in schools, including building social-emotional skills and capacities of children, parents, teachers, service providers and school leaders. (10/13)

Synthesis of Rationales: It takes a village to support children and families – everyone who works with children and their families has a role to play in supporting the whole child. Social-emotional learning is foundational to children's growth and development; as human beings, we can't learn without social emotional competence. When social-emotional needs are met, there is the foundation for the acquisition of academic and other skills, including what it means to be a citizen. Educators need support in implementing social-emotional learning. Schools can build on the synergy that exists in the community with current efforts and focus on the research that supports evidence-based practices to teach social-emotional skills (e.g. identification of emotions, establishing routines, problem-solving, and self-regulation). A more robust approach in this area will help and empower students and families to succeed, prevent school bullying and violence.

Rationales:

- Need implementation support, coordinator/coach to follow up on strategies, progress, and use of techniques. Social Emotional learning goes along with all other development/learning and can't be left out.
- Must teach the whole child. Everyone needs to be informed. Soft skills, life skills, teach how to navigate the world.
- Children start learning with social –emotional and can't learn without social emotional competence.

- Social-emotional learning lays the foundation for the acquisition of academic and other skills. Build on the synergy that exists in the community with current efforts and focus on the research that supports evidence-based practices to teach social-emotional skills (e.g. identification of emotions, establishing routines, problem-solving, and self-regulation).
- It takes a village to support children and families - we are all important in the equation. Helps teachers develop skills to support children and increase learning. Helps reduce absenteeism and expulsion. Equity – helps everyone who need services/support can access it.
- Children are not coming into school with the skills that they need and we suppose that it might be that they are more integrated with their tablets than with each other and their parents. And we feel that school is a place where social-emotional health is more supported and more beneficial.
- Participants believed this was necessary and could be accomplished by clearly defining social emotional behaviors and providing more training on this for teachers and families.
- Help and empower families and students to succeed, prevent bullying and school violence.

4. Use a collaborative care model across child-serving systems to ensure attention to early childhood mental health is infused throughout. Build increased cooperation between mental health providers and the health, education, family supports, and child welfare systems at the community, county and state levels to implement a **comprehensive, shared framework for advancing young children’s mental health and social-emotional development.** (8/13)

Synthesis of Rationales: Collaboration benefits children, families and communities and yet our current system is fragmented and siloed. Implementing a collaborative care model within child-serving systems will mean attention to early childhood mental health throughout, which will benefit children and families by building a common understanding across systems. In order to build a strong, collaborative system where agencies work together, all parties need to all agree on a single approach that is routine, repetitive, and consistent across all fields. A first step would be to ensure that mental health is integrated into the managed care system for Medicaid.

Rationales:

- School as home base for services, use system of care coordinators.
- There is some synergy (e.g. director of HHS of NC called for a unifying system that can address the issue of mental health across systems). A first step would be to ensure that mental health is integrated into managed care system for Medicaid.
- Need to all agree on a single approach so the approach that is implemented is routine and repetitive and consistent across all fields.

- Collaboration benefits child, family, community because of its efficiency; collaborative reporting should be required for agencies using same funding source.
- Integrating mental health, physical health and primary care, along with using a collaborative care model within child serving systems to ensure attention to early childhood mental health is infused throughout.
- Our current health care is very fragmented and it is very difficult for parents to access the child's care in a convenient way.
- Supports most of the Pathways criteria. Builds a common understanding across agencies, provides clarity in language and standards across sectors.
- More integrated support services. Link services with pre-school and ensure social-emotional health is emphasized.

5. Use data to track community needs, available services, and racial disparities in service provision and outcomes, and use the data to adjust provision of services appropriately. (8/13)

Synthesis of Rationales: Reliable and consistent data is important to ensure the best interventions are being chosen for the population served. Without good data that is collected and accessed, you do not have an accurate gauge on what is being done currently, what groups are being left out, what is working and what isn't. Data helps determine trends so that programming and services can be tailored to specific needs while channeling financial funding to the greatest needs. A community-level view is essential to address issues and leverage resources and provides the opportunities for more equal access to those resources.

Rationales:

- Anytime you use data it makes it easier to look at where the need is to make adjustments.
- Always there to use, based on info, concrete, accessible by more than one person more than one time.
- Searchable.
- Helps to determine trends.
- Data drives change and you can't have evaluative info without data.
- Ensures that the best interventions are being chosen for the population served. Helps to identify needs and gaps, provides opportunity to track and measure.
- Provide community guides of supports and services.
- Data feeds initiatives, when informed by developmental science. It tailors programming and services to specific needs. Data also adjusts the money flow/funding based on outcomes.
- Data is important, as if you do not have a good gauge on what is being done currently and what is being done successfully, and what groups are being left out, we are not going to be able to make changes that will bring the desired outcomes.
- Ask our families (collect their feedback as data) on what they need. Also assess/identify resources located in communities.

- A community level view is essential to address issues and leverage resources; ensures equal access to all resources.

6. Expand screening and early identification activities, using diagnostic and screening instruments that are valid for minority populations, to detect social-emotional problems in infants and toddlers, such as relationship disorders, depression, and self-regulation problems. **Include screening for family risk factors** that might affect children's social-emotional development—for example, poverty, pre- and postnatal parental depression, family isolation, parental mental illness, or parental substance abuse. (7/13)

Synthesis of Rationales: Early detection and intervention to address social-emotional issues in infants and toddlers, including screening for ACEs, trauma and other social determinants of health, improves outcomes for children and families. Early intervention works and saves the system money.

Rationales:

- Early detection is the best, period.
- We are not going on how the child looks to us. We are using research.
- Relationship disorders are important and having breakdown between provider-parent can create a lot of problems.
- Screening has to do with intervention and stopping the gaps.
- Early detection and intervention to address social-emotional issues in infants and toddlers improves outcomes for children and families. Early intervention works and saves the system money!
- Include ACEs screenings and trauma treatment.
- Comprehensive and includes child and family. Early identification and intervention; actionable and data and research driven using valid instruments.
- Supports the Pathways criteria. Major themes revolved around under assessments for infants and toddlers attributed to wait and see attitudes, usage of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) for all children, (not just those that fall in the Criterion), and lack of assessments conducted for English Language Learners.

7. Improve access for parents and expectant parents to screening, services and supports for substance abuse and addiction, family violence, depression, and other adult mental health disorders, including by using two-generation strategies. (7/13)

Synthesis of Rationales: Children must be understood in the context of their families and communities. Unmet parental mental health, substance use and other needs can negatively impact children. Identifying parents' needs, either before the child arrives, or very shortly thereafter, and ensuring access to the services and supports parents need can improve short- and long-term child and family outcomes.

Rationales:

- Acknowledges that child can/will be a product of their environment and provides support so families don't feel alone.
- Make services available to those who self-report, rather than just for those who've been identified by DSS or law enforcement.
- This would improve quality of life within the home for all members.
- Includes child and family focus, more equitable, early identification and intervention.
- If you can't identify those issues with the parent, either before the child arrives, or very shortly thereafter, the child is going to suffer because of those issues. Very important for early intervention to occur, and NE NC is not immune to the opioid epidemic and we need to move to fix that.
- Address core needs of opioid addiction.

8. Improve access to health insurance for children and parents and ensure that children's insurance and Medicaid payment policies provide coverage for developmental screening, including screening for social-emotional health, payment for preventive services, and payment for appropriate treatments (6/13)

Synthesis of Rationales: Access to health insurance is vital for children to receive needed medical services, therapies, and treatment. There are economic barriers to accessing insurance and medical services that need be addressed, both for families and for providers: families can only do what they can afford, and providers need workable reimbursement rates to continue providing services. Medicaid prioritization should not result in higher costs for the most vulnerable families; families should not have to choose which necessities to prioritize.

Rationales:

- Insurance is not the only answer, high co-pays, denial of service also an issue.
- Mental health services are expensive.
- A lot of people don't understand insurance or where to get insurance.
- Only so many billable hours.
- People have misused services because providers have not used the billable hours appropriately.
- Identify that parents won't do what they can't afford. Providers may not do what they are not reimbursed for (or at a high enough rate.)
- Cost savings if Medicaid is privatized should not be at the expense of our children and most vulnerable families; families should never be forced to choose which necessities to prioritize; parents must have financial assistance to care for their children in the way they need.
- Access to affordable health insurance is vital for all children to receive needed medical services, therapies, and treatment.
- We have to eliminate economic barriers for full access.

9. Ensure access to high quality parenting programs, adult education and workforce training supports. (6/13)

Synthesis of Rationales: Because children are embedded in families, support for parents will translate to support for children. Parenting, adult and workforce supports address the whole family model of care and create a partnership between home and educational settings. As programs are being developed, it's important to do so with communities so that the services really needed are what are being provided. Once parents are connected to programs, it's essential they are welcomed and don't feel judged for accessing help.

Rationales:

- Underlying issue is parent education, need informal supports too, need parents not to feel judged when accessing help.
- Parenting, adult and workforce supports address the whole family model of care and create a partnership between home and educational setting. Through parenting education, families at risk are provided resources and more importantly, opportunity for growth and empowerment.
- Assess the needs of the families within the community to ensure needed services are being provided.
- Access for parent supports family resources (income). Equity-available to anyone. Support for parents equates to better outcomes for children.
- Parents indicated a strong desire for programs.
- Participants expressed the need for parent resource centers, parenting skills classes, and workforce development.

Regular School Attendance Strategies Prioritized by Local Communities

The following eight strategies related to regular school attendance were regarded as most important in the Community Conversations. These are in priority order.

1. Authentically engage with parents and provide parent education and support around child development, wellness, early literacy, parenting and school attendance. (10/13)

Synthesis of Rationales: Family engagement begins at birth and continues through the early years of a child's life when parents and other family members claim their roles as their child's first teacher. Authentic, culturally competent engagement builds strong and respectful bridges between home and learning environments and encourages parent involvement. Finding ways to build bridges is ongoing work and includes welcoming and connecting with families in ways that make sense to them and meeting them where they are. Building these bridges will increase student attendance and achievement.

Rationales:

- Authentic engagement is key to this, have some good programs but they don't reach enough families.
- From a public health aspect especially. Main one addressing the parent education issue.
- Family engagement begins at birth and continues through the early years of child's life when parents and other family members claim their roles as their child's first teacher. Authentic engagement also builds strong and respectful bridges between home and learning environments.
- This encourages parent involvement which will result in student achievement and decrease absenteeism and truancy.
- Truly engaging parents teaches our community how to grow children; home is the first learning environment and parents are first teachers.
- What kind of system can we create that makes sense to the parent? Written in a way that they understand and finding a way to solve the parent's issues/ meeting them where they are. Have to find a way to talk to a parent that shares the reasons why, but without turning off the parent.
- All services should be multi-cultural and family friendly and welcoming.
- Evidence shows this demographic will benefit and be more participatory when genuinely engaged.
- Must have parent engagement piece and focus on education and importance of school attendance.

2. Provide wraparound supports through schools, such as home visits, summer learning opportunities, housing supports and health and nutrition services, to help meet families' basic needs and support regular attendance and early literacy. (7/13)

Synthesis of Rationales: Serving family and community needs in ongoing, multilevel ways is essential to children being ready to learn. Wraparound supports through schools ensure services are coming to families where they are and addressing health, housing, food and other basic needs. As a result, families will be able to provide a more consistent, stable environment that will benefit children.

Rationales:

- Children learn better when housing and other basic needs are met. This will help families provide a more consistent, stable environment.
- Provide free/affordable programs for children after school and include supports for school nurses and physical health.
- These services areas are so important – going to where they are, because parents may be intimidated by their own memories.
- NC has high food insecurity for kids. How is this possible in an agricultural state?
- This strategy needs to include summer sessions (more than half day for preschoolers), after school, and home visits. While still ensuring cultural responsiveness.

- Serving the needs of family and community is an important piece of ensuring children are ready to learn. Need to include early childhood.

3. Support specific efforts to recruit, professionally prepare, compensate and retain a well-qualified workforce across multiple birth through eight settings, including family and center-based child care as well as public and charter schools. (7/13)

Synthesis of Rationales: A well-prepared and well-compensated workforce with expertise in child development across the age span (birth – grade 3) connects with families around developmentally appropriate practice and builds relationships with colleagues across systems in order to improve child outcomes. Educators who are well-prepared, well-compensated, diverse and equity-competent create a high-quality workforce that shapes the future leaders of our society and are the key to ensuring that children are successful in school and life.

Rationales:

- Highly qualified and appropriately compensated staff equal high quality educational experiences. Can't have a quality program without quality people.
- A well prepared and adequately compensated workforce with expertise in child development across the age span (birth – grade 3) connects with families around developmentally appropriate practice and builds relationships with colleagues across systems in order to improve child outcomes.
- It is not in any way OK to pay early childhood teachers minimum wage; retention of a quality early education workforce provides continuity for children and supports their learning; early childhood efforts should equal K-12 efforts.
- Teachers and principals who have never worked with disabled children or English Language Learners students or students with mental illness, need to know how to teach and lead them.
- Can't have a high-quality program without high quality teachers; can't keep high quality teachers without compensation.
- Creates a quality workforce that impacts students. Needs to be a diverse group to effectively teach children of color, English language learners, children with disabilities and low-income.
- These folks shape the future leaders of our society and are the key to ensuring that children are successful in school and life.

4. Ensure safe and supportive learning environments and positive school climates, including focusing on social-emotional health and learning. (5/13)

Synthesis of Rationales: Children learn best in a safe, nurturing, supportive environment, and research shows that social-emotional development is the foundation for academic and other skills. A positive school climate maximizes children's exposure to caring adults who are well-versed in meeting their social-emotional needs in a safe and welcoming environment.

Rationales:

- Children can only learn and grow in a safe, nurturing, supportive environment.
- Research is strong around social-emotional development as the foundation for academic and other skills. Safe and supportive environments include early educators and others as caregivers of children.
- This will encourage parental involvement, student centered schools, and increased student achievement. Children need to feel emotionally safe to express their needs.
- Children can't learn when they do not feel safe; staff need education in social-emotional strategies.
- All efforts need to be child friendly and welcoming.

5. Create policies across sectors that collectively lower the burden of stress on families due to the often-interrelated threats of poverty, crime, mental illness, substance abuse, discrimination, and community violence, and support parents and other caregivers in their roles as nurturers and providers. (5/13)

Synthesis of Rationales: Families are experiencing a lot of stress, which adversely impacts the well-being of children. Policies and practices that address these sources of stress, like paid family leave, support the whole child and family approach to system change. Collaboration, integration of support systems and leveraging resources will build an environment for healthy children and families.

Rationales:

- Allow parents to focus on more than just basic needs.
- Collaboration and integration of support systems (and leveraging resources) will build an environment for well children and families.
- Policies and practices that address these barriers support the whole child and family approach to system change. The influence of stress on families and child well-being cannot be overstated.
- Systemic effects of community 'ills' on families must be acknowledged and addressed; families are experiencing too much stress and need support.
- Making sure that we are offering things when parents can actually attend or participate. A lot of our parents are paid by the hour and don't necessarily have paid time off. So, maybe we should consider having policy like other countries where there is paid leave for parents to be able to take care of their children's issues. And the results show those children are better educated.

6. Ensure equitable and adequate funding for K-3 education, including investing in supports which are more likely to contribute to student academic success and decrease disparities, and monitor funding distribution. (4/13)

Synthesis of Rationales: Equitable and adequate funding will help meet the needs of children and families that have been identified. All schools should have adequate resources, including for well-compensated teachers and sufficient student support staff. Equitable and adequate funding is needed for early care and education, across the birth through age eight spectrum.

Rationales:

- Teacher pay issued covered.
- Need to put assistants back into the early grade levels and add more school social workers and counselors.
- Funding is a critical piece but this strategy needs to include Birth-5 early care and education to meet the criterion of whole child and family as well as addressing a critical gap in our system.
- A child in a lower funded school shouldn't have to suffer because of lack of resources.

7. Conduct outreach to raise parent, policymaker, and broader stakeholder awareness about the causes and impacts of chronic absenteeism and the benefits of regular attendance. (4/13)

Synthesis of Rationales: How do we help parents recognize how important it is for kids to be at school? Educating parents about the root causes of why students are absent is crucial. Given that parents are often juggling many responsibilities, including work and caring for other children, we need to reach parents in ways that work for them to stress the importance of having students in school. Chronic absenteeism often results in diminished student achievement and attendance habits are carried over as children enter the workforce.

Rationales:

- Need to reach parents without affecting their other responsibilities – work, caring for children etc. We need to address root causes.
- Everyone needs to be on the same page. Education of parents on the importance of attendance is crucial. Conducting outreach – going to parents is key.
- Helping people to recognize how important it is for kids to be at school. And just because they missed the bus, is not a reason for them to be absent. How can we resolve this?
- Chronic absenteeism often results in diminished student achievement and for attendance habits it over as children enter the workforce.

8. Build a strong screening, assessment, and treatment pipeline for identifying and addressing children's health and learning issues. (4/13)

Synthesis of Rationales: Ensuring children's health and learning issues have been addressed will allow them to have their greatest needs identified and to get appropriate services to help

them be successful. In order to accomplish this, we need a health strategy that is universal, across all ages and settings.

Rationales:

- Allow for student's greatest needs to be identified.
- What is already in place? There isn't consistency or coordination. Health and development knowledge could help.
- Ensuring children have been assessed will allow them to get the appropriate services to help them be successful.
- Must have a health strategy in this process, needs to be universal across all ages and settings.

High-Quality Birth-Through-Age-Eight Education Strategies Prioritized by Local Communities

The following seven strategies related to high quality education were regarded as most important in the Community Conversations. These are in priority order.

1. Develop a comprehensive birth-through-third-grade system for young children's academic success. Advancing students' academic success in the early grades will require an intentional, comprehensive system that involves students, families and teachers working together at the school, community and state levels. *10/13 Community Conversations chose this strategy.*

Synthesis of Rationales: Early education sets the foundation for future academic success, and starting at birth is vital. A comprehensive system that includes students, families, and teachers working together across all ages and transitions is paramount to consistent student achievement and should ensure learning expectations are developmentally appropriate and relationships are collaborative. The comprehensive system also needs to include a strong screening, assessment and treatment pipeline.

Rationales:

- Research increases knowledge; data helps evaluate the circumstances and addresses birth – kindergarten transitions, accessibility and wrap around supports.
- A comprehensive system eliminates barriers and aligns with Pathways to streamline process across agencies.
- Early education sets the foundation for future academic success. A system that includes students, families, and teachers working together is paramount to consistent student achievement.
- Starting at birth is vital; a comprehensive system should ensure learning expectations are developmentally appropriate; use a care-management model for children from families with high stress; family/teacher partnerships create a collaborative learning environment.

- Parents and teachers can be aware of the learning capabilities of their child at each stage and given tools/resources to help enhance their cognitive ability, not just sit 18-month old in front of the TV as a learning tool.
- Consistent communication! Intentionally include students, families, state and government - give a standard, relatable message to all (100 days absent in 3 years is a ½ year of school missed).
- How can we help prepare the birth to the preschool age, when the school system doesn't really have any control over that? How can we gain that continuum of services? How can we create a system that can be sustained and ensure success? The gap just keeps getting bigger unless we address.
- Comprehensive is the keyword here, includes families and all ages and transitions through the process, but needs to also include a strong screening, assessment and treatment pipeline. Should also include libraries in this strategy.

2. Authentically engage with parents and provide parent education and support around child development, wellness, early literacy, parenting and school attendance. (10/13)

Synthesis of Rationales: Family engagement begins at birth and continues through the early years of a child's life when parents and other family members claim their roles as their child's first teacher. Authentic, culturally competent engagement builds strong and respectful bridges between home and learning environments and encourages parent involvement. Finding ways to build bridges is ongoing work and includes welcoming and connecting with families in ways that make sense to them and meeting them where they are. Building these bridges will increase student attendance and achievement.

Rationales:

- Authentic engagement is key to this, have some good programs but they don't reach enough families.
- From a public health aspect especially. Main one addressing the parent education issue.
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- What kind of system can we create that makes sense to the parent? Written in a way that they understand and finding a way to solve the parent's issues/ meeting them where they are. Have to find a way to talk to a parent that shares the reasons why, but without turning off the parent.

- All services should be multi-cultural and family friendly and welcoming.
- Evidence shows this demographic will benefit and be more participatory when genuinely engaged.
- Must have parent engagement piece and focus on education and importance of school attendance.

3. Make high-quality early care and education more affordable for families. (8/13)

Synthesis of Rationales: High-quality early care is expensive, often more than rent or mortgage, and parents have to choose the level of care they can afford based on their budgets. Subsidies make high-quality care possible for economically-challenged families. Affordable high quality opportunities have been shown to be essential for positive child outcomes and family engagement, and prioritizing funding for childcare subsidies is necessary to achieve this goal for all children. Childcare subsidies also have an impact on childcare facilities themselves, to maintain quality and professionalize teacher salaries.

Rationales:

- High quality care is expensive, often more than rent or mortgage and parents have to choose care based on budget, and pay attention to availability of (especially) infant/toddler care.
- Affordable high quality opportunities are essential for positive child outcomes and family engagement.
- Prioritizing funding for childcare subsidy is necessary to achieve this goal. Childcare facilities can't stay open because parents can't afford the tuition needed to maintain quality and increase teacher pay.
- Families cannot afford current childcare and we need to make it more affordable.
- Giving ALL children/families (an equal opportunity), excluding disparities.
- There's also a need for universal Pre-K services.
- If we want more families to participate, especially those economically challenged, it must be affordable.

4. Provide wraparound supports through schools, such as home visits, summer learning opportunities, housing supports and health and nutrition services, to help meet families' basic needs and support regular attendance and early literacy. (7/13)

Synthesis of Rationales: Serving family and community needs in ongoing, multilevel ways is essential to children being ready to learn. Wraparound supports through schools ensure services are coming to families where they are and addressing health, housing, food and other basic needs. As a result, families will be able to provide a more consistent, stable environment that will benefit children.

Rationales:

- Children learn better when housing and other basic needs are met. This will help families provide a more consistent, stable environment.
- Provide free/affordable programs for children after school and include supports for school nurses and physical health.
- These services areas are so important – going to where they are, because parents may be intimidated by their own memories.
- NC has high food insecurity for kids. How is this possible in an agricultural state?
- This strategy needs to include summer sessions (more than half day for preschoolers), after school, and home visits. While still ensuring cultural responsiveness.
- Serving the needs of family and community is an important piece of ensuring children are ready to learn. Need to include early childhood.

5. Support specific efforts to recruit, professionally prepare, compensate and retain a well-qualified workforce across multiple birth through eight settings, including family and center-based child care as well as public and charter schools. (7/13)

Synthesis of Rationales: A well-prepared and well-compensated workforce with expertise in child development across the age span (birth – grade 3) connects with families around developmentally appropriate practice and builds relationships with colleagues across systems in order to improve child outcomes. Educators who are well-prepared, well-compensated, diverse and equity-competent create a high-quality workforce that shapes the future leaders of our society and are the key to ensuring that children are successful in school and life.

Rationales:

- Highly qualified and appropriately compensated staff equal high quality educational experiences. Can't have a quality program without quality people.
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- Can't have a high-quality program without high quality teachers; can't keep high quality teachers without compensation.
- Creates a quality workforce that impacts students. Needs to be a diverse group to effectively teach children of color, English language learners, children with disabilities and low-income.

- These folks shape the future leaders of our society and are the key to ensuring that children are successful in school and life.

6. Ensure safe and supportive learning environments and positive school climates, including focusing on social-emotional health and learning. (5/13)

Synthesis of Rationales: Children learn best in a safe, nurturing, supportive environment, and research shows that social-emotional development is the foundation for academic and other skills. A positive school climate maximizes children’s exposure to caring adults who are well-versed in meeting their social-emotional needs in a safe and welcoming environment.

Rationales:

- Children can only learn and grow in a safe, nurturing, supportive environment.
- Research is strong around social-emotional development as the foundation for academic and other skills. Safe and supportive environments include early educators and others as caregivers of children.
- This will encourage parental involvement, student centered schools, and increased student achievement. Children need to feel emotionally safe to express their needs.
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