Responsive to the Evolving Experiences & Needs of Children & Families and the Systems that Serve Them
About the

NORTH CAROLINA EARLY CHILDHOOD FOUNDATION

The North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation (NCECF) is tackling one of the greatest challenges facing our state: the majority of our children are not reading proficiently by the end of third grade.

Furthermore, child outcomes data make it clear that race is a ubiquitous factor in perpetuating inequities on the measures that matter for third-grade reading proficiency and overall child well-being.

Research shows that improving third grade reading takes aligned policies and practices all working toward a common vision of optimal child development beginning at birth with a focus on children’s health and development, families and communities, and high-quality learning environments.

It also takes an intentional focus on equity to ensure that those children and families furthest from opportunity have access to the most supports.

Our work is based on the foundational belief that sustainable and lasting progress will take collaborative action, recognizing that together we can realize greater outcomes for young children than any of us can produce on our own.

www.buildthefoundation.org

Our vision is that each North Carolina child has a strong foundation for life-long health, education, and well-being supported by a comprehensive, equitable birth-to-eight ecosystem.

Our mission is to marshal North Carolina’s great people, ideas, and achievements to ensure equitable access to opportunity and success for every child by the end of third grade.
IN ORDER TO BE EFFECTIVE, BE RESPONSIVE.

In order to be responsive, listen.

Sharon Weil, ChangeAbility: How Artists, Activists, and Awakeners Navigate Change
In the second year of living through a pandemic, we continued to seek and elevate the lived experience of parents, child care providers, small businesses, communities, and families.

Motivated and guided by their stories, we stay focused on data-driven action and continue to push toward equitable early childhood systems change in North Carolina.
Letter from Our 
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

It’s fair to say that systems change is never quick, yet almost always positive. The slow improvement is positive because it ultimately follows the arc of progress and the push for what people need and want. In 2021, NCECF, along with our partners and collaborators focused on responding to the needs and desires of people—young children, families, and educators—most proximate to the problems in our early childhood systems, which should be serving and supporting our communities.

In this annual report, we are pleased to share some of the highlights of our second pandemic year with you. COVID has been a long and evolving journey laying bare the fragility of our antiquated and oftentimes unresponsive systems. Last year, we listened and this year we continued to listen and began to level our response. There is much work to be done to solve seemingly intractable challenges—ones of inequity and many lacking in foresight. However, we are steadied by the words of Dr. King who said, “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”

Creating responsive systems takes time but we are well on our way. We look forward to continuing the good work in hope and solidarity with this generation of leaders and changemakers—leaders committed to possibility, equity, and abundance - with responsive leadership.

In hope and solidarity,

Muffy Grant
The Year 2021
A SNAPSHOT BY
THE NUMBERS

1 New Teammate
TO HELP US TELL OUR STORIES IN OTHER CREATIVE WAYS

40 Events
TO CONVENE PARTNERS AND STAKEHOLDERS, AND BUILD PUBLIC WILL FOR INVESTMENTS IN EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

83 Publications
SUCH AS BLOGS, REPORTS AND MEDIA PIECES WENT OUT THROUGH OUR WEBSITE AND OTHER NEWS OUTLETS AS WE WERE TURNED TO AS A TRUSTED PROVIDER OF EARLY CHILDHOOD RELATED FACTS

4,733 People
WHO ACCESSED OUR FAMILY FORWARD NC COVID-19 RAPID RESPONSE RESOURCES

12,263 Followers
AND SUBSCRIBERS ACROSS OUR NEWSLETTER AND SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS
Efforts like Family Forward NC can really help companies to figure out good solutions—especially smaller businesses that may not realize that some of these family-friendly workplace initiatives can actually be easier or more economical to implement than they realize.

— Chris Chung • CEO, Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina

Given the strong out of state interest in Family Forward NC (FFNC), we interviewed organizations we had spoken to previously to explore how to support them in a sustainable way. From those conversations, we determined that there was a market for licensing a package of copyrighted Family Forward NC materials that could be customized for other states or communities.
We completed FFNC materials to license to out-of-state organizations, and outlined training and consultation opportunities to accompany a license. Our team became actively engaged in outreach to sell How to Build a Family-Forward Community licenses, offering virtual training even to out-of-state organizations planning to launch family-friendly workplace initiatives. A webinar with 22 participants from seven states resulted in selling licenses to the Missoula Economic Partnership, The Children’s Movement of Florida and the Minnesota Little Moments Count initiative. In addition, we worked with the Pennsylvania Governor’s Early Learning Investment Commission to build its Investments in Caring initiative. Conversations with others continue.

To prepare to launch our Family Forward NC Employer Certification, we established an Advisory Council to provide feedback to the proposed certification model. A Family Forward NC workplace certification designates employers that offer policies and practices that support the health and well-being of working families and children. With a great mix of advisors, from the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce to the Economic Development Partnership of NC, the Rural Center’s Corner Square Community Capital, a restaurant owner and more, they brought diverse perspectives to the table, contributing to a successful model for certification.

Our HR consultants, the Performentor team, researched certification models across the country; created the initial application questionnaire for employer certification; and prepared options for: the tier structure, fees, verification, and opportunities for value added services for certified employers.

The scoring of employers is based on best-practice policies, with guidance from national medical organizations, experts in early childhood and our Pathways to Grade-Level Reading rubric. We considered how the model can promote equity, ensuring no barriers to the model that would deter historically underrepresented businesses and small businesses from participating. The Family Forward NC Employer Certification will launch in the summer of 2022.

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Family Forward NC has been an incredible partner in educating the Greensboro business community on best practices for family-friendly workforce practices. We have seen a culture shift in the community since the launch of our Talent Together partnership—including improving our own workplace policies. Together, we are making sure Greensboro is well-known as a community of choice for families, and family-friendly workplaces.

— Cecelia Thompson • Executive Director, Action Greensboro
STORY TWO

Pathways to Grade-Level Reading—Responding to Partners & Developing Collaborative Tools

Together, Pathways stakeholders co-created shared measures, aligned policies and coordinated strategies that support children’s success. Now, we're working to advance them.

We continued to advance the work of Pathways by responding to early childhood data development needs that align with the Measures of Success, and building a tool to help drive actions that promote grade-level reading and child well-being in North Carolina.
EARLY CHILDHOOD DATA ADVISORY COUNCIL

In partnership with the Division of Child Development and Early Education and NC Department of Public Instruction’s Office of Early Learning, we planned and facilitated quarterly meetings of the NC Early Childhood Data Advisory Council to help improve the quality and scope of early childhood data in the state. During the meetings, we shared cross-sector early childhood data initiatives, and discussed the impact of the pandemic on data collection and quality.

The Council also worked to develop two important child care measures, prioritized in the Early Childhood Data Development Strategy, which did not have disaggregated state-level data by race/ethnicity and income. This included convening a workgroup to develop a plan for collecting and disseminating the disaggregated measures.

In response to feedback from partners around challenges with accessing data, NCECF created and disseminated a summary of NC Early Childhood Data Sources including partner data platforms, national resources, and the Pathways Data Dashboard that can be used to support advocacy, planning, and decision making.

PATHWAYS ACTION MAP

To create the Pathways Action Map, a new online tool, which provides a snapshot of NC initiatives impacting more than 40 prioritized policy and strategy areas, we engaged advisors and diverse stakeholders throughout the year using various strategies. We listened and learned about work going on across the state in each of the action areas, and were responsive to partners’ feedback to inform the Map’s development.

We incorporated their input by updating our messaging to support engagement, improving our systems and technology, and uploading initiative information to the yet-to-be-released Map. People were supportive and saw value in the tool, as it was in development. They also expressed limited time to contribute, and a desire to see and learn more about the Map to better understand how it will be used. In response, we adapted our timeline, strategy, and outreach to build a more collaborative and sustainable tool to be developed and used over time. The Pathways Action Map is set to launch in the spring of 2022.
I wish more people would actually listen to us when we voice our concerns. We have to be his parent and advocate, sometimes we would benefit from having a coordinator to help us understand the next process.

— North Carolina parent

We advanced the EarlyWell Initiative, in partnership with NC Child, by responding to family and stakeholder voices to help strengthen and enhance the infant and early childhood mental health system in North Carolina. EarlyWell builds on Expectation 4 of the Pathways Action Framework, which focuses on ensuring North Carolina’s social-emotional health system is accessible and high-quality.
LISTENING TO FAMILIES

The Lean In & Listen Up Report, released by the NC Early Childhood Foundation and NC Child in April 2021, provided a window into what families need and want from North Carolina’s social-emotional health system for babies and young children.

The report themes ideas, recommendations, and personal stories from more than 200 interviews and surveys with parents of young children in North Carolina. Some themes we heard from parents and caregivers include:

- Healthy, well-adjusted parents are the most important resource for young children’s social-emotional health and development.
- There is a wide variety of services and programs that families either do not currently have access to, or that they feel there should be more of.
- What families value most in providers are good people skills and compassion.
- Families are very concerned about being able to access the services their children need.
- Additional barriers, like social drivers of health, also prevent families from accessing services.
- Respondents of all races reported incidents where they felt they had been treated differently because of their race.

The report is intended to be a guide for Earlywell, as well as advocates, policymakers, clinicians, funders, and others interested in improving the systems of care that address social-emotional well-being for children, from prenatal to age eight.

ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS TO DEVELOP RECOMMENDATIONS

From January to August of 2021, NCECF and NC Child supported twelve cross sector workgroups—including over 100 stakeholders in a process that centered data, family voice, and racial equity—to develop policy and system recommendations to strengthen North Carolina’s infant and early childhood mental health system. The workgroups represented key areas of the system, such as early intervention, health insurance, and early care and education.

We partnered with Empowered Parents in Community (EPiC) to provide support to family leaders engaged in the workgroups, and ensure workgroups incorporated a racial equity lens throughout the process.

All told, the workgroups responded to family and stakeholder input by proposing 30 policy and practice recommendations, spanning areas of social-emotional health promotion, prevention, intervention, and treatment services. The recommendations address critical areas such as workforce development, assessment, family navigation, data, compensation, and payment structures. They will be incorporated into a report and action plan, developed by NC Child with support from NCECF, to be implemented over the next 8-10 years.
NCECF’s Continuous Commitment to Racial Equity and Early Care & Learning

If 2020 was a year of introspection, then 2021 can be defined as a year of clarity—grappling with how our role as an organization ties into the greater vision that every young child deserves equitable access to life-long health, education, and well-being.

— Sumera Syed • Organizational Equity Officer, North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation

We intentionally center racial equity in multiple aspects of our work and have stated our position formally in our Strategic Plan, where we recommitted our mission and vision statement to highlight racial equity as an overarching theme woven throughout the organization’s work. We explicitly acknowledge the impact of systemic racism and seek to prioritize strategies, policies, and practices designed to both disrupt racism and alleviate its effects on North Carolina’s young children and families.
Some of the initiative-based progress at NCECF includes:

- Engaging NC Campaign for Grade-Level Reading communities in shared learning around racial equity, including how to use a racial equity lens to determine goals and guide strategy choices in their collaboration.

- Using NCECF social media to highlight racial equity issues in early childhood and lift up work led by people and communities of color.

- Supporting work to incorporate a racial equity lens and family leadership in the EarlyWell Initiative; a collaborative, cross-sector effort co-led with NC Child to develop a robust social-emotional health system for young children and their families in NC. This includes contracting with a racial equity consultant and ensuring diverse representation and leadership in workgroups.

Some of the internal organizational-based progress at NCECF includes:

- Developing a written racial equity plan with clear actions, timelines, people responsible for each action, indicators of progress and processes for monitoring and evaluation.

- Reviewing the existing items/policies including the employee handbook, listing salaries in job descriptions, and updating new board member orientations.

- Collecting and reporting demographic data that demonstrates the makeup of NCECF’s board of directors and staff.

- Developing written procedures to increase the recruitment, retention and promotion of people of color and hiring to address racial and ethnic inequities, prioritizing the hiring for racial and gender diversity.

At NCECF, we are encouraged by what we have achieved and are aware that there is a long road ahead that will take more than a lifetime of dedication and hard work so that one day, racial identity will no longer serve as a predictor of one’s life outcomes.

**EXPLORING WHAT NORTH CAROLINA’S EARLY CARE AND LEARNING SYSTEMS MEAN TO FAMILIES**

Imagine if North Carolina’s early care and education system was accessible, affordable and responsive to the needs and desires of all families, especially families of color. That is the vision for the new coalition of Care and Learning (CandL), which began to develop over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. The plan to achieve this continued to evolve as we, along with the other coordinators at NC Child, worked to build trust and genuine relationships both at the state level and in local communities and take a more intentional family and community centered approach, in collaboration with the Black Child Development Institute-Charlotte, Empowered Parents in Community and other groups. We garnered funding support to continue to convene this work and interest in investing additional funds.

In working to create a nine-month listening tour to create early childhood education policy and program recommendations that families and caregivers desire, CandL Family and Community Engagement Team held a retreat in Fall 2021. NCECF will spearhead the communications work for the tour and continue to convene partners as the work develops.
Our Generous DONORS IN 2021

We are grateful to the organizations and individuals who invest in our shared vision to build a strong foundation for learning and life success for each North Carolina child.

- Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina
- Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation
- ChildTrust Foundation
- John Rex Endowment
- Joseph M. Bryan Foundation of Greater Greensboro
- Missoula Economic Partnership
- NC Department of Health and Human Services
- NC Institute of Medicine
- Pacific Western Bank
- The Cemala Foundation
- The Duke Endowment
- Triangle Community Foundation
- Winer Family Foundation
- Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation
- CARES Act: SBA Paycheck Protection Program & Employee Retention Tax Credit
- Individual Contributors
2021 FINANCIAL DATA

2021 REVENUE

- GOVERNMENT (16%)
- FOUNDATIONS (82%)
- INDIVIDUALS (1%)
- PRIVATE BUSINESS (<1%)
- PROGRAM, INTEREST, & MISC (<1%)

2021 FUNCTIONAL EXPENSES

- MANAGEMENT & GENERAL (30%)
- FUNDRAISING (3%)
- PROGRAM (67%)
2021 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Easter Maynard
Board Chair

Patti Gillenwater
Vice Chair

Peggy Wang
Treasurer

Banu Valladares
Secretary

Dr. Sheresa Blanchard

Dr. Eric Bracy

Peggy Carter

Sherry Franklin

Tracey Greene-Washington

Nation Hahn

Hal Kaplan

Matty Lazo-Chadderton

Rashidah Morgan

Dr. Munro Richardson

Harold Sellars

Dr. Jennifer Vu

2021 NCECF STAFF MEMBERS

NCECF is led by an inspired and diverse group of women. Our staff is fascinated by the development of language and communication in babies and urgent in our desire to promote the voices and needs of the under-represented and under-resourced. We work together to create an NC that fully supports the health, well-being, and education of each and every child, advocating for systemic change across sectors.

Muffy Grant
Executive Director

Mandy Ableidinger
Deputy Director

Lisa Finaldi
Community Engagement Leader

Kaylan Sloane
Finance & Operational Manager

Mary Mathew
Collaboration & Policy Leader

Lindsay Saunders
Marketing & Communications Leader

Sumera Syed
Organizational Equity Officer
Our vision is that each North Carolina child has a strong foundation for life-long health, education, and well-being supported by a comprehensive, equitable birth-to-eight ecosystem.