

**ACTION 1.1**

*To strengthen families' understanding of their own power, invest in family education about how to understand and navigate through child and family systems, and be a voice (advocate) for their own and their children's needs at child care, in school and in health care settings.*

# SUPPORT FAMILIES in **ADVOCATING** for their **CHILDREN**

Parents and caregivers are children's first and most important teachers, nurturers, and advocates. They are the experts on their children. Children thrive when families are valued and supported in advocating for their family's needs and accessing available resources. Family engagement and leadership during the earliest years of a child's life are some of the most powerful predictors of a child's development and success in school.

## WHAT WE KNOW

The more information parents and caregivers have about the actions they can take to foster healthy development the stronger their ability to fulfill their role as children's first teachers. Effective parenting is made up of many skills that can be developed through supportive interventions.

Parents and caregivers are the ultimate experts on their children and the more they know about the resources available through the broad range of health, child care, and educational institutions they encounter, the more empowered they will be to identify and request access to the supports their children need to thrive.

### Dive Into the Data

One of the ways that parents and other caregivers can become better advocated for their children is through [home visiting programs](#). A statewide assessment showed that in fiscal year 2018-2019, over 16,000 NC families were served by home visiting programs and over 66,000 home visits were provided. However, there is a lot of variation in access to home visiting that is primarily determined by where families live in the state: 12 counties served zero families with evidence-based home visiting programs.

**LESS THAN 5%** of families who could benefit from home visiting services are supported by the existing availability of programs.

Many may think that home visiting programs are only needed during children's first year of life when first-time parents are learning how to navigate this new role, but Home visiting also plays a critical role helping parents having their second or third child learn how to balance the different developmental needs of multiple children. The most recent 2021 data from North Carolina shows that **53% of home visits were for families with children between 12 to 35 months of age**. This varies across racial/ethnic groups, with **34% of Black families participating in home visiting compared to 44% of white families; of families participating in home visiting 22% are Hispanic**. Explore this indicator and more through the [Pathways Data Dashboard](#).

## WHAT WE NEED

We must approach this from a strengths and assets framework, which is rooted in the belief that parents want to do what is best for their children. What parents need is information, resources, and opportunities to cultivate the skills to become effective advocates.

Policymakers and administrators who are authentic in their desire to have parents and caregivers as partners in decision-making will receive the input needed to create initiatives that are culturally responsive and therefore more effective for the communities and constituents they serve.

## HOW TO SUPPORT

The overwhelming majority of the funding (88%) for North Carolina's home visiting services come from government funding sources, with the remaining 12% coming from philanthropic sources.<sup>1</sup> Philanthropic organizations interested in supporting families through advancing home visiting programs might want to consider targeting their efforts in the following **12 counties that currently have no home visiting services:**

- Alleghany
- Clay
- Graham
- Greene
- Lincoln
- Madison
- Montgomery
- Moore
- Stanly
- Transylvania
- Warren
- Wilkes

It is important to note that formal home visiting programs, which provide critical support for NC's highest need families, are only one of **numerous ways that nonprofit and community organizations build the capacity of parents and caregivers** to advocate for their children.

Parents and caregivers' lived experience gives them deep insight into their children's needs. It is our job to strengthen their voices.

## INITIATIVES WORKING IN THIS AREA



### **Empowered Parents in Community**

**(EPiC)** aims to cultivate parent leadership and improve family

engagement to better support students' educational needs. Their mission is to dismantle systemic racial inequities in education. They advocate for high quality educational opportunities and equitable distribution of resources. They do this by intentionally engaging Black parents and empowering them through collective organization to advocate for accountability at all levels to close the educational opportunity gap.



### **Exceptional Children's Assistance**

**Center (ECAC)** is committed to

improving the lives and education of

ALL children with emphasis on children with disabilities and special health care needs. They affirm the right of all individuals, from all backgrounds and cultures, with or without disabilities, to an appropriate education and other needed services. They make that right a reality by providing information, education, and support to parents of children with disabilities and special health care needs.



### **Village of Wisdom (VOW)** organizes

Black parent power by codifying their wisdom and expertise into tools and

resources that support how parents and educators build culturally affirming learning environments. They design learning experiences that support how Black parents activate their agency in research, cultural organizing, leadership, and instructional liberation. Their ultimate goal is to position Black parents as experts in building the environments needed for Black children to thrive.

**Visit the Pathways Action Map** to learn more about initiatives leading efforts to advance this action.