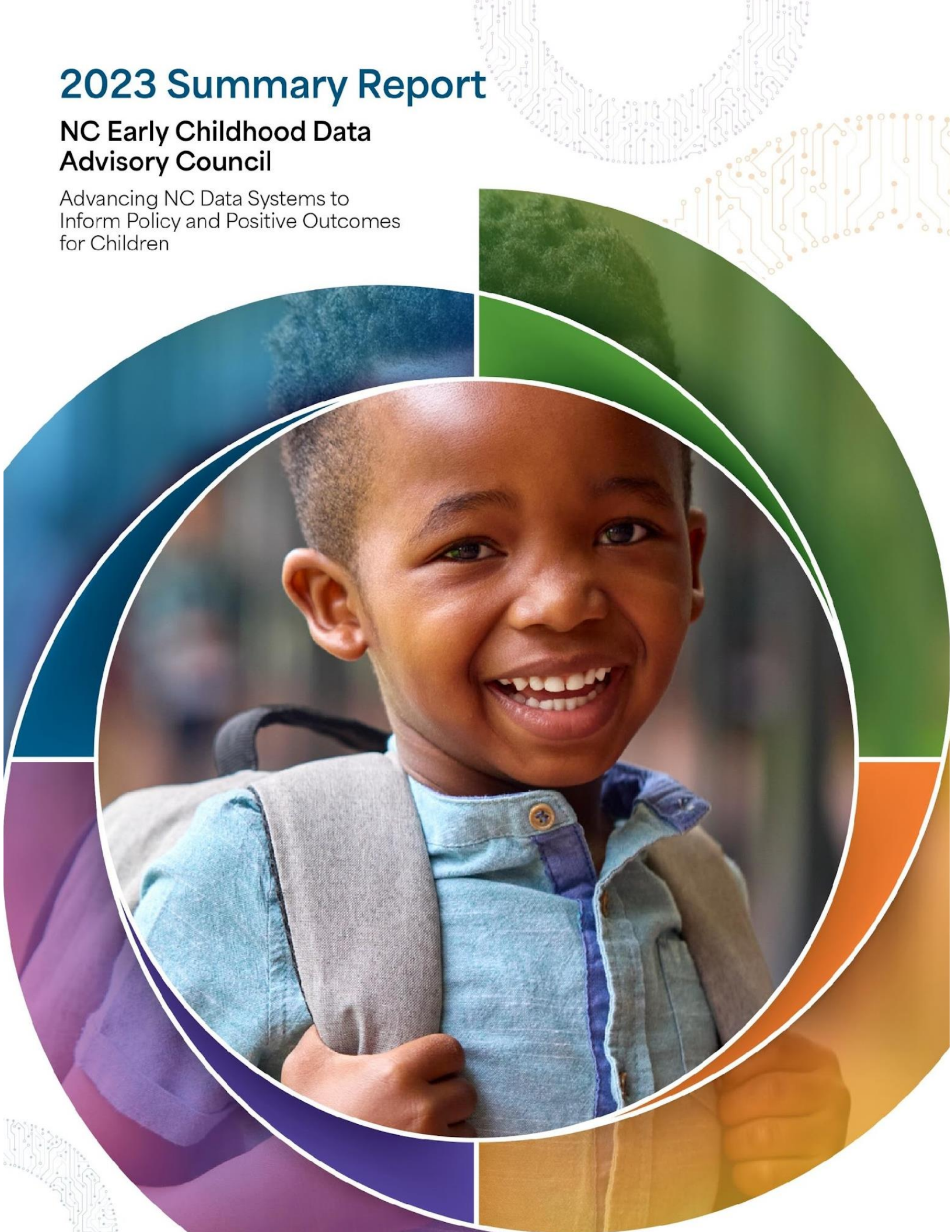


2023 Summary Report

NC Early Childhood Data Advisory Council

Advancing NC Data Systems to
Inform Policy and Positive Outcomes
for Children



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North Carolina Early Childhood Data Advisory Council (ECDAC)

Advancing NC Data Systems to Inform Policy and Positive Outcomes for Children

We would like to acknowledge the Early Childhood Data Advisory Council members and participants who contributed to the report: Eliza Gary, Mary Mathew, Tanya Morgan, Mary Payson, Dale Richards, Justine Rogoff, and Trip Stallings.

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Introduction

Comprehensive, integrated data is a critical and valued tool for informed decision-making, policy prioritization, and resource targeting. However, in North Carolina (NC) and many other states, existing data and new data collection can often be fragmented, uncoordinated, and inaccessible. Through philanthropic investment from the Duke Endowment and public investments from North Carolina’s Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE), the statewide Early Childhood Data Advisory Council (ECDAC) was established. The convening of this unique circle of thought leaders helped improve data systems and access through efficient responses to system advancement questions and policy recommendation proposals under consideration. There has been strong appreciation for the role of the ECDAC by state agencies and nonprofit organizations focused on improving outcomes for children and families.

The ECDAC is a collaborative effort between the North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation and the Department of Health and Human Services and includes members from DHHS divisions, the Department of Public Instruction (DPI), the Department of Information Technology and data researchers and practitioners from outside state government. The ECDAC is tasked with providing strategic direction and using its influence and decision-making authority to improve the quality and scope of early childhood data collection, and to support widespread analysis and use of early childhood data by policymakers and other decision-makers.

The ECDAC was formalized in 2019, initially funded by an investment from The Duke Endowment. From 2021 to 2023 the EDCAC was funded as an activity of a broader Preschool Development Grant B-5 (PDG B-5), administered by the North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE). Goal 5 of the Preschool Development Grant focuses on strengthening North Carolina’s early care and education mixed delivery system (ECE system). ***The work of the ECDAC serves one of the objectives under this goal, which is to improve early childhood data systems to facilitate the state’s ability to measure progress toward its goals and to assist policymakers in ECE program planning and coordination.***

PRESCHOOL DEVELOPMENT GRANT Funded Key Data Improvement Activities		
NC Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS)	NC Early Childhood Data Advisory Council	Data Platform to Support Transitions From Preschool to Kindergarten
Local Data-Informed Strategic Planning (LDISP)		NCCARE360

Child Trends, Data-Related Efforts Funded by the North Carolina, Preschool Development Grant, Birth to Age 5, November 2023

Different agencies collect a substantial amount of data as children and families access health care, social services, childcare, and early education programs. Existing data from NC's currently funded programs support the positive impacts of evidence-based early childhood investments. Data also show that many children who would benefit from various publicly funded child and family programs cannot get access. High-quality data, disaggregated by race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, region, and other factors, is needed to answer critical questions on policy and funding. Improving how existing and new program data is captured, housed, and integrated can help.

Like most states, the work supporting young children and its affiliated data is held in many agencies and organizations that are siloed from each other. For example, NC's Department of Public Instruction holds student data for kindergarten through 12th grade on individual student performance, while NC's Division of Child Development and Early Education collects child specific data on early intervention services and the state's funded NC Pre-Kindergarten program, while data regarding children participating in Early Head Start and Head Start programs is housed in its own system at the federal level. Integrating data together from these three data sources would give a clearer view of what early childhood programs and interventions best support positive outcomes for children and families. Integration of early childhood data would provide a more comprehensive view of children's experiences and needs, and could inform smarter investment of public resources.

The North Carolina Early Childhood Integrated Data System (NC ECIDS) creates a single source of access to information from multiple early childhood programs. NC ECIDS allows for analysis that supports policymakers and practitioners for the benefit of families and children. Integrating data is particularly important for a fragmented system like early childhood where vulnerable families must go to many different agencies for support for food and housing, early intervention, childcare, and preschool, Medicaid, and the Children's Health Insurance Program.

Additionally, the ECDAC played a significant role in identifying gaps in data and measures supporting two statewide dashboards: [Pathways to Grade-Level Reading \(Pathways\) Measures of Success](#) and the [NC](#)



[Early Childhood Action Plan \(NC ECAP\)](#).

Understanding the interplay between the state's primary hub for integrated data, and the specific needs of dashboards that inform progress and future investments, created a shared understanding of the needs and the benefits of integrated data work.

The ECDAC's capacity for intellectual review and actionable response fostered a new level of networking and collaboration among NC's top data leaders. Funding to support the ECDAC concluded at the end of 2023. New funding is needed to keep this highly valuable data integration network in place for the state of North Carolina.

This summary report of the ECDAC's activity references Child Trends Preschool Development

Grant reporting on grant impact, Preschool Development Grant Summary Reports, ECDAC meeting minutes, records, and presentations, and interviews with seven ECDAC members representing the ECDAC's diverse stakeholders.

Background

The origins of the ECDAC go back to 2015, when the NC Pathways to Grade-Level Reading (Pathways) initiative partnered with the NC Institute of Medicine and formed a Data Action Team. The team identified shared birth-to-eight, whole child measures, creating the Pathways Measures of Success Framework. While some of the data supporting measures already existed and were well organized, some were not. This group began the initial work to identify gaps in data needed specifically for Pathways tracking, how it could be collected, and what resources would be needed to do so.

In 2019, the NC Early Childhood Data Advisory Council was formed to provide strategic direction to improve the quality and scope of early childhood data collection in North Carolina, funded by a federal Preschool Development Grant B-5. In this iteration, the ECDAC was initially co-led by the [NC Early Childhood Foundation](#) (NCECF), [NC Department of Health and Human Services Division of Child Development and Early Education](#) (DCDEE), the [NC Department of Public Instruction Office of Early Learning](#) (OEL), and the [NC Department of Information Technology](#). Consisting of state agencies, researchers, and other early childhood data stakeholders, the ECDAC has supported widespread analysis and use of early childhood data by policymakers and across systems-level decision-makers.

ECDAC Structure

Purpose

- Provide strategic direction and use its influence and decision-making authority to improve the quality and scope of early childhood data collection.
- Support widespread analysis and use of early childhood data by policymakers and other decision-makers.

Rationale

- North Carolina continues its important work to improve the quality, collection, analysis, and use of cross-sector early childhood data through various initiatives:
 - [NC's Early Childhood Integrated Data System \(NC ECIDS\)](#)
 - [Pathways to Grade-Level Reading \(Pathways\) Measures of Success](#)
 - [NC Early Childhood Action Plan \(NC ECAP\)](#)
 - Several other data dashboards developed by state agencies
- This data work requires an oversight group to guide and expand it, which the ECDAC aimed to do.

Objectives

The objectives of the ECDAC are to:

- Improve the quality and scope of early childhood data available by identifying definitions and data collection approaches for shared measures for which data are not currently collected in the state.
- Advocate for state and local agencies and organizations to align their work around the Pathways and NC's Early Childhood Action Plan measures.
- Advocate for and facilitate better public early childhood data sharing.

- Provide guidance, feedback, and support so that the state’s early childhood work, throughout the ECAP and Pathways, remains grounded in data and research.
- Build partnerships with other existing data groups so as not to duplicate efforts.
- Serve as ambassadors for the NC ECIDs, Early Childhood Action Plan, and Pathways Measures of Success by staying up to date about current priorities and the status of initiatives.

Membership

The ECDAC engaged approximately 39 cross-sector members from state agencies and statewide organizations, including:

- The NC ECIDS Governance Council
- Department of Health and Human Services and its Divisions
- Department of Public Instruction
- Research institutions that analyze and use early childhood data
- State organizations and funders involved in early childhood data collection and analysis
- Nonprofits leading early childhood data efforts at state and local levels

Overarching characteristics for ECDAC members include:

- A commitment to acknowledging and eliminating systemic inequities and racial, ethnic, and socio-economic disparities in early childhood experiences, opportunities, and outcomes.
- Deep knowledge of North Carolina’s current early childhood data.
- A commitment to being data- and research-driven.
- An eagerness to think outside the box of what the state currently does and imagine possibilities.
- A commitment to action and to finding a good – even if imperfect – starting place for the work.

The Coordinating Team invited and appointed members, with recommendations from the ECDAC and a commitment to engaging diverse data leaders. Members renewed their commitment to the ECDAC in January of each year. New members were considered and added as appropriate.

Frequency of meetings/Modes of interaction

From May 2019 to December 2023, the ECDAC held 18 quarterly meetings.

ECDAC members served with an agreement to:

- Attend quarterly meetings
- Contribute to ECDAC objectives in their respective roles and networks.
- Share knowledge and information about relevant early childhood data efforts at meetings and/or suggest ideas for presenters and initiatives to learn about that will be of value to the group.
- Conduct work between meetings, as needed and able, such as gathering relevant information about data in their fields and/or participating in workgroups to support data development goals.

Benefits of Engagement

ECDAC members have developed meaningful relationships with other data advisors, gained awareness of opportunities for data improvement and integration, and generously shared their expertise. That focus of expertise, combined with the authority of members to prioritize learnings and lead action on recommendations, built respect for the work of the ECDAC and between members. Members have found benefits of participation based on roles and reported enhanced awareness of happenings in research, data, policies, and practices.

“Understanding the full landscape of early childhood data systems helps us to see opportunities for coordination and collaboration across agencies and systems and avoid duplication of effort.”

- Dan Tetreault, Assistant Director of Early Learning, NC Department of Public Instruction

“One benefit of engagement was understanding and hearing how folks react to the need for data and how data are being used, where are those gaps in data – that is helpful to understand. From my kind of world, listening to the ECDAC... it has just been really informative to hear from both state folks as well as other researchers... what they're working on, what the landscape looks like, within the state, what are people grappling with related to data?”

- Dale Epstein Richards, Ph.D., Senior Director, Early Childhood, *Child Trends*

“Trust is so important with data work, and all of us in the programs need to trust one another to share data. [In North Carolina] we are well past that in a way because we have NC ECIDS - Data is shared, but nonetheless, that human relationship and this is not just my opinion, but in my work with data over the years, looking at data stewardship, and data integration, because early childhood is fragmented – blended, braided - our arena needs to especially know and trust one another. And when I say trust, it's just shorthand for relationships. **When relationships are strong, the sharing process is faster and more efficient.** Because when there is no sharing of data, there's no foundation in place, it could take a long time... **If there is trust with leaders coming together in a meeting like this, that can help move that process along.**”

- Mary Payson, Early Childhood Transitions and Data Systems, *Shine Early Learning*



ECDAC Experiences | Objective Outcomes

This section shares how the ECDAC functioned as a body, met key objectives, and carried forward recommendations. Highlights include examples of the work and quotes from participants.



Improve the quality and scope of early childhood data available by identifying definitions and data collection approaches for shared measures for which data are not currently collected in the state.

A major function of the ECDAC was to identify gaps in available data needed to track early childhood experiences and program investments. Since its earliest iterations, the ECDAC has benefited from workgroups led by various partner agencies of the ECDAC. The workgroups identified what kind of measures best indicate progress, what data exists to support that measure, and what is the quality and availability of that data to serve tracking needs. Further, the workgroups discussed strategies for short-term and long-term solutions for data procurement.

ECDAC Related Workgroups

- [The Education and Family Supports Workgroup](#)
- [Social-Emotional Health \(SEH\) Measures Workgroup](#)
- [Socio-Economic Workgroup](#)
- [Child Development and Kindergarten Entry Data Workgroup](#)

Racial Equity Considerations

As workgroups explored measures and available data, trends emerged in missing and disorganized data, related to race and ethnicity. To take on this complex issue, the group first grounded itself in research and best practices regarding Race and Ethnicity data.

ECDAC's racial equity work began with capacity building to ensure that members would understand and appreciate the need for disaggregated data and that standard data strategies may create errors when recording cultural diversity. Some naming practices and cultural concerns about providing identifying data are not intentionally considered in the collection, linking, and analysis of data. Some examples of ECDAC activities that supported this area of work were:

- The ECDAC reviewed and accessed resources such as the [Centering Racial Equity Throughout Data Collection Toolkit](#) and [CounterPart Consultant's: Racial Equity, a Path for Community Impact](#) training for creating shared definitions and understandings.
- ECDAC participants received a presentation from Van-Kim Lin, Ph.D., a Senior Researcher from Child Trends, to support equity-centered coordinated state ECE data systems. The presentation discussed how marginalized social groups may face challenges in accessing early childhood services due to the cost of early childhood services, hours of operation, location of high-quality services, and overall availability of services. The work is part of the [Early Childhood Data Collaborative](#) at Child Trends, a national convening of early childhood data leaders.

The Early Childhood Data Collaborative, a pre-ECDAC group that led early data system efforts, presented recommendations to incorporate racial equity in integrated data work to include:

- Designing policy questions centered on equitable processes and outcomes
- Establishing a governance body in partnership with communities
- Creating an identification system to connect information about children, families, programs, and staff for a more complete picture of needs

In the ECDAC chapter of data system work, the gaps in data were identified and prioritized to meet reporting and analysis goals:

- **The Education and Family Supports Workgroup** identified the following measures for prioritization:
 - **Regular Attendance and Suspension/Expulsion**
 - Percent of students who are chronically absent in K-3rd, disaggregated by race/ethnicity, income, school district and age
 - Percent of children who are chronically absent from NC PreK, disaggregated by race/ethnicity, income, and county/school district
 - Children suspended and expelled from childcare programs and elementary schools, disaggregated by county/school district, race/ethnicity, income, and age
 - **Affordable High-Quality Childcare**
 - Estimated eligible children under age 6 receiving childcare subsidies, disaggregated by race/ethnicity, income
 - Families paying 10 percent or less of their income on childcare, disaggregated by race/ethnicity, income, and age of child
- The ECDAC's **Social-Emotional Health (SEH) Measures Workgroup** identified the following measure for prioritization:
 - Percent of young children screened for social-emotional health (SEH) needs, disaggregated by race/ethnicity, income, and county

The workgroup compiled the following plan:

- NC DHHS and partners discussed using Medicaid claim data to collect an SEH screen and related data for young children. Also, the workgroup discussed private health insurance (e.g., BCBSNC) data opportunities. Members suggested the application of specific ICD codes.

- NC DHHS included the “Flourishing” metric (from the Child and Family Health Measures on the National Survey of Children's Health) on the Child Behavioral Health Dashboard and considered future options for the use of national survey data (e.g., oversampling).
- Briefings on The Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Task Force, EarlyWell, and other initiatives’ data development were shared.
- In a later update, Medicaid claims and private insurance data from screenings were considered potential reporting metrics, as with the Flourishing metric from the National Survey of Child Health. The group also discussed existing legislation that drastically shifts procedures for data-sharing agreements. The ECDAC continued to track Medicaid Expansion updates.

Additional examples of activity supporting the objective:

- Dr. Iheoma Iruka of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill presented findings from a recent report, "Black Parent Voices: Resilience in the Face of the Two Pandemics—COVID-19 and Racism," highlighting COVID-19’s effects on Black Families' experiences regarding racism and discrimination, financial well-being, health and mental health, and early care and education options using national Rapid-EC survey data collected from Black families with children ages zero to five.
- An initial report on the Preschool Development Grant identified a gap in tribal data available. This gap was conveyed to the ECDAC to be included in gap data considerations.
- Paul Lanier, UNC School of Social Work, briefed the group on a new research project UNC is undertaking to estimate the prevalence of preschool exclusionary discipline. The pilot study tested a new survey method to collect this data instead of relying on official records to explore suspension and expulsion across NC – as there have been challenges in obtaining this information.
- The NC Early Childhood Foundation participated in a preschool suspension/expulsion advisory group led by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Wake County Smart Start Partnership. The advisory group's work will support the ECDAC 's work (initiated last year) on developing preschool suspension/expulsion data measures as outlined in the Early Childhood Data Development Strategy.
- NC Department of Public Instruction presented updates on preschool suspension/expulsion data, sharing new federal requirements to report disciplinary data for 3-5-year-olds by race and disciplinary action. The presentation highlighted concerns with the quality of the available preschool discipline data and a need to ensure providers follow a consistent and clear definition for preschool expulsion. There are also significant differences between federal and state definitions. Plans to work with the Center for Safe Schools to rewrite this definition and to provide refresher training to all school districts in spring 2022 were shared. ECDAC members also voted to select the new data development strategies for 2022 to include social-emotional health screening measures and food insecurity.

- The NC Early Childhood Foundation met with DCDEE and The Hunt Institute to determine if it's possible to include family income measure data collection in the North Carolina Birth to Five Needs Assessment Update process.



Advocate for state and local agencies and organizations to align their work around the Pathways and NC ECAP measures.

The ECDAC fostered alignment around measures through the continued and consistent engagement of leaders and decision-makers who carried updates and information back to their organizations and entities and had the influence to make data alignments a priority.

The work of the ECDAC has helped improve coordination and sharing by providing consistent convening opportunities and including cross-sector data leaders who may not be in routine conversation or familiar with one another's work. The ECDAC also expanded its meetings to include the NC ECIDS Governance Council, bringing additional statewide data professionals to hear the activity, contribute to the discussions, and carry back learnings and updates to their communities. Workgroups further expanded participation across the state by bringing in experts on specific workgroup topics.

"Meetings have a lot of good information packed into them, and I've been able to share this info with local partnerships to help inform their strategic planning and funding decisions based on better data."

– Casey Strange, Director of Learning and Evaluation, North Carolina Partnership for Children

Numerous examples within this report show the benefits and synergy of the regular convening and consideration of issues. **Most impactful to the future of North Carolina's children and their families is the ability to move policy.** Read below how NC's DCDEE's Justine Rogoff ECDAC interactions help DCDEE move forward recommendations more efficiently and effectively:

ECDAC Engagement Highlight

North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE), represented by Justine Rogoff, Data Lead, regularly brought policy considerations and updates to the group for feedback and input. In a closing participant interview, she shared the value of having a high-level assemblage of decision-makers with expert knowledge. In one meeting, she could share information, receive live feedback, hear recommendations for change, and leave the meeting ready to move policy steps forward. Contrast this efficient system for policy feedback loops with months-long survey and interview efforts that can move at a snail's pace.

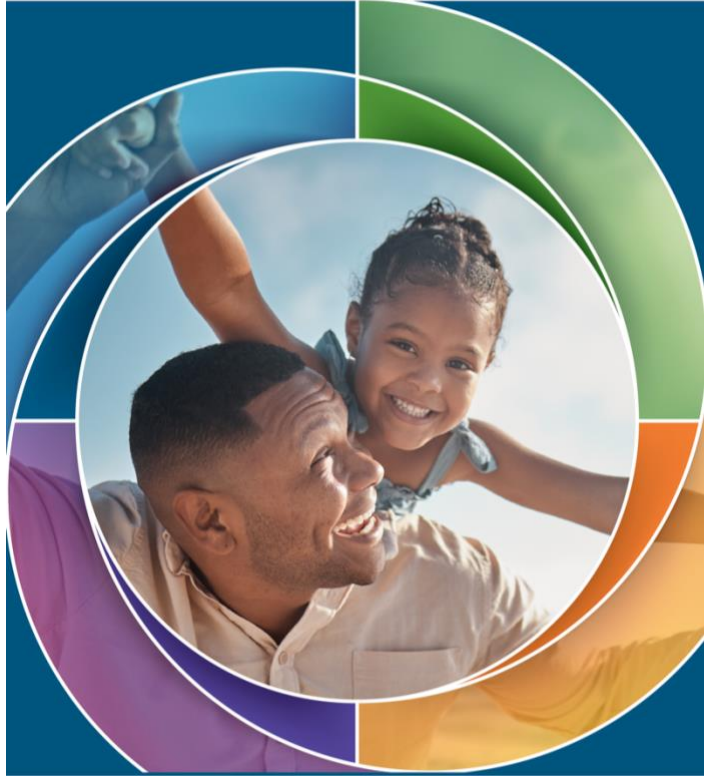
"The folks on [the ECDAC] are some of my most relevant colleagues in the state because there are folks from early childhood specifically focused on data. And so for me, it was extremely valuable to have that space to connect with them to provide them with updates of what DCDEE is up to get their feedback on any work that we're doing that I felt like it was relevant for them to either just know

about or for them to have the opportunity to offer guidance...The space was very, very valuable... It was a good way to foster collaborative work for early childhood data across the state.

... [the ECDAC] was like a sort of one-stop shop to get feedback from a lot of early childhood data, folks with lots of different backgrounds.”

- Justine Rogoff, Early Childhood Data and Policy Analyst, DCDEE

Members of the ECDAC attest to the same benefits of convening that have helped move their own agency’s data integration work further and faster. **A key question by members is how the state will replace this function and maintain forward momentum.**





Advocate for and facilitate better public early childhood data sharing.

The ECDAC supported the alignment of measures associated with two statewide dashboards (Pathways Measures of Success and NC Early Childhood Action Plan) and worked to strengthen the Early Childhood Integrated Data System. ECDAC members served as a high-level briefing and stakeholder testing space regarding dashboard data access and Early Childhood Integrated Data System tools. Through demonstrations during quarterly meetings, attendees became familiar with the tools and resources and could share them in their workspaces and communities with some general familiarity and understanding of their value. Ongoing meetings enabled them to provide feedback that strengthened the development of those dashboards.

NC EARLY CHILDHOOD DATA COUNCIL FOCUS

Pathways to Grade Level Reading Measures



NC Early Childhood Action Plan Measures



ALONG WITH ADDITIONAL STATEWIDE DASHBOARDS

NC ECIDS improvements were a central focus of meetings because it is at the forefront of strengthening North Carolina's ability to make informed decisions about early childhood policy. It is the place where data integration holds the most potential for driving policy and practice. Dr. Tanya Morgan, NC ECIDS Project Manager for DCDEE, engaged ECDAC members through:

- NC ECIDS updates at every quarterly meeting, including progress in developing the Data Selector Tool, ETL modification (ETL is a process that extracts, transforms, and loads data from multiple sources), e-Link integration, revisions to the NC ECIDS data dictionary, creation of data administration reports, and ongoing integration of the new early childhood programs.
- Briefings on Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI), Home Visiting for Healthy Families America and Nurse-Family Partnership, and Head Start data integration into the system.
- Overviews of the NC ECIDS Data Reports Dashboard. The presentation highlighted interactive features that include filters to sort data by fiscal year, gender, race, and age group from 2013 forward. The ECDAC got an overview of additional features: a map of NC and charting to show county data, pop-ups, and a help icon to provide more information about reports.

- Work updates regarding an overarching Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and the process of completing reviews with plans. The team shared its continued efforts to integrate additional data sources (Home Visiting, Early Hearing Detection and Intervention, Head Start) – now complete – into NC ECIDS and working with the NC Longitudinal Data System (NCLDS) to coordinate data sharing and integration into the more extensive state system.
- With the ECDAC as a live focus group, NC ECIDS presented an overview of the new Data Selector Tool developed by the NC ECIDS team to modernize the data and reporting system. The ECDAC provided feedback while gaining beneficiary orientation.

Additional examples of activity supporting the objective:

- DCDEE connected the NCECF and Foundation for Health Leadership and Innovation activity leads to discuss the feasibility of using NCCARE360 data to examine mental health needs and service provision for young children and families.
- Trip Stallings, Executive Director for the NC Longitudinal Data System, shared updates on North Carolina’s efforts to establish a Longitudinal Data System. The vision for this system is to formalize a data exchange and research partnership between data-contributing state agencies/organizations, partners, and the public. His team has established a Data Governance Committee that will be responsible for reviewing research and data requests and a Data Quality Committee.
- Justine Rogoff of DCDEE introduced DCDEE’s new Early Care and Learning Dashboard, which included options for filtering data county for NC Early Care and Learning, NC Pre-K, and Subsidized Childcare Assistance programs. The NC Department of Public Instruction’s Office of Early Learning provided updates on forming a panel of stakeholders to review and provide recommendations for interpreting NC Early Learning Inventory data.

Through the course of the ECDAC’s activity, the quality and quantity of available integrated data grew, as well as the development of tools needed to access the information quickly. An assessment performed by Child Trends at the end of the engagement period, along with interviews post-convening, showed strong current usages of data, as well as clear understandings among users of what is possible ahead:

DATA SYSTEM USAGE

Current Uses

- Inform progress toward goals
- Track child performance
- Align Pre-K and kindergarten assessments curriculum, and standards
- Meet reporting requirements and provide information to policy makers
- Assist ECE providers with making referrals

Future Uses

- Aggregate formative assessment data
- Describe specific populations or locales
- Determine areas of need related to ECE
- Highlight areas of successes and need related to children’s development
- Generate longitudinal reporting
- Inform policy, and program planning

Data-Related Efforts Funded by the NC PDG B-5 Evaluation Report, November 2023

[Click here](#) to learn more about the North Carolina Early Childhood Data Advisory Council



Provide guidance, feedback, and support so that the state’s early childhood work, throughout the Early Childhood Action Plan and Pathways, remains grounded in data and research.

The ECDAC met the objective to provide guidance, feedback, and support for the state’s key initiatives measuring impact through its consistent convening and scholarly discourse and research-driven considerations. Further, research and data experts composed the members, and therefore, their active participation created substantial interest in the objective’s core interest.

As mentioned, the Preschool Development Grant funded improvements to other areas of activity related to NC’s early childhood data. These included the enhancements and modernization of NC ECIDS and the NCCARE360 system and integrating Pre-K to kindergarten transition data. ECAP and Pathways have connections and dependencies to these additional areas of funded data work. ECDAC participants working on these other areas of funding activity routinely brought updates to meetings on the activity, including highlights on what data was available and how to access it, how policy is affected by the data availability, what research is telling us about the data and outcomes, and how the broader community can better understand, access, and utilize the data.

Additional activity supporting this objective was provided by Dan Tetreault from the NC Department of Public Instruction’s (NCDPI) Office of Early Learning, including:

- Hosting an ECDAC member discussion on how NC DPI worked with the Center for Education Measurement and Evaluation at UNC-Charlotte and diverse stakeholders (including early educators) in a standard-setting process for the NC Early Learning Inventory (ELI). NC ELI is the state’s kindergarten entry assessment based on sixteen Teaching Strategies GOLD dimensions.
- Shared "Pathways to Grade-Level Reading Policy and Practice Action Toolkit" to guide how policymakers, advocates, community nonprofits, the business community, and other stakeholders can use the Pathways to Grade-Level Reading Framework and Data support efforts to improve the well-being of all NC children.
- Briefed ECDAC members on a new effort to improve the consistency of student records and preschool data stored in PowerSchool by facilitating PowerSchool integration with Pre-K rosters.

Other members actively brought updates as well, such as:

- NCDHHS’s Data Office presented a data-sharing guidebook, outlined steps for data requests, and provided descriptions of data flow, governance structures, and roles. The Data Office also highlighted how it would execute Data Sharing Agreements with each NCDHHS Division/Office to enhance data sharing. Every meeting was full of updates that supported this objective and its expected outcomes.
- NCECF shared experiences working with a vendor on data visualizations for the Pathways Measures Dashboard.

- DCDEE brought updates routinely on data work related to the NC’s Early Childhood Action Plan measures, seeking input, and inviting in research experts to present on the topics to bolster shared understandings.

Having NC ECIDS leadership and representatives from the NC ECIDS Governance Council provided alignment opportunities throughout the process as NC ECIDS took up new data sets and further identified data capture and usage issues. Access to the ECDAC allows user experience feedback across various organizations, paired with informed recommendations for improvements.



“The benefit is really learning more about some of the people who are in the day-to-day work outside of my state agencies, with what others are doing, and some of the gaps that they actually have, and how we can help them figure out how to work some of those gaps, and somewhat fulfilling some of their needs... Are there things keeping them up at night? And they may need to figure out how could we solve some of this... and it may be something we're working on something here at the state for that... How can we come together to make this a strong partnership to be able to achieve the goal and help the citizens?”

- Tanya Morgan, Ph.D., IT Project Manager, NC ECIDS, NC DCDEE

Closing

Durable, equitable data infrastructure requires fostering statewide collaborations across all levels of government, as well as with a diverse community of child and family serving organizations. This is best accomplished when there is a formal networking infrastructure such as the ECDAC, which thoughtfully recruited early childhood data owners and users from across the state. Two years of philanthropic and three years of public funding has created an informed statewide network of early childhood leaders, positioned for meaningful impact on the utility of early childhood data. Continuing the ECDAC enhances public transparency of the needs and wellbeing of children and families and provides legislators and government agencies with access to easily interpretable data.

NC's ECDAC serves a critical role in maximizing the utility/usability of the data capacities rapidly growing across the state. It provides a valued circle of experts that can steward the creation of new data integration and visualizations. The ECDAC has done this by identifying gaps in data necessary to understand the experiences and needs of children and families across the state and then creating multiple workgroups for deeper investigation and providing actionable recommendations for improvements.

The ECDAC supported many of the efforts of the Preschool Development Grant by providing cross-sector expert input to a broad range of data-related topics. Meetings took up special data quality, access, equity, security, and integration topics and provided routine briefings on leading data activity in the state, bolstering awareness and collaborative synergy on related projects. It was common for meeting discussions to raise probing questions and inform recommendations to the speaker, helping ECDAC members to advance work efficiently.

In addition to the objectives highlighted, ECDAC members also worked successfully to build partnerships with other existing data groups to reduce duplication and serve as ambassadors for the dashboards, keeping current on priorities and statuses of initiatives. Trust was a hallmark of the group, with an investment in goals unusual for multi-year initiatives. High attendance at meetings confirmed the value, and surveys by data users showed awareness of NC ECIDS, Pathways Measures, and the NC's Early Childhood Action Plan at the end of the ECDAC's grant-funded period, with more familiarity needed for DPI's Teaching Strategies' data resources.



As the PDG B-5 grant concluded, Child Trend’s survey of data users about future data development and integration opportunities ahead for the state; much of what they identified could be facilitated by continued work of the ECDAC:

- Develop and leverage existing resources to increase data partners’ knowledge and understanding of available data and data systems to promote greater use.
- Solicit input from current and potential users to ensure that data systems are being designed to meet end users’ needs.
- Build data literacy and data use skills among both administrators and data partners.
- Increase access to disaggregated data available at the local level to assist with monitoring progress and with planning and coordination efforts.
- Establish requirements for documenting processes and decisions to ensure historical knowledge of data systems, which can support their sustainability.
- Implement permanent structures, such as staffing and ongoing funding, to sustain and grow data systems and increase capacity for data use at the state and local levels.

What’s at risk as funding to facilitate ECDAC Meetings Ends?

No other circle of early childhood data experts convenes in this way and holds decision-making power within their roles. While innovative work will continue within the discreet organizations that makeup the ECDAC membership, the state would lose a mode for problem-solving and information-sharing efficiency. It is reasonable to anticipate that this may slow innovation and decision-making utility in the early childhood data arena.

Although substantial progress has been made and the data dashboards described in this report have made the wellbeing, service utilization, and needs of young children and their families more transparent, substantial work lies ahead to utilize data fully. Data administrators and users report continued data quality issues and collaboration challenges.

- Data Quality
 - Inconsistent methods and process of data capture
 - Lack of data documentation
 - Difficulty cleaning and interpreting self-reported demographic data
- Data fragmentation and sharing
 - Data are collected and stored in different databases that are not networked
 - Inability to link data from multiple sources because of lacking common identifier variables
 - Data-sharing processes are challenging

There are also persistent gaps in data that are important to decision-making on policy and program investment:

- Data on the ECE workforce
- Child-level data from programs such as NC Pre-K, Head Start, and Children’s Health Insurance/Medicaid, disaggregated by race
- Measures that enable assessment of children’s social-emotional development and health

What is needed to sustain and advance the state’s ECE data systems, data administrators and users?

Funding and Dedicated staff to support ECDAC functions: Administrators need permanent staff and funding to keep data systems running at their current/intended scale. Managing the ECDAC’s activities and workgroups is beyond the capacity of participating agencies to absorb. Funded, dedicated staff would allow the ECDAC to work forward on additional needs necessary for advancement:

- **Training & Awareness:** Administrators and data partners want more training in how to use the data systems and awareness of what data is available.
- **Coordination & Collaboration:** Coordination and collaboration across data systems can support sustainability and growth and prevent duplication of efforts.
- **Enhanced Data Collection & Sharing:** Administrators and data partners need more data on children and families from more programs to support planning and outreach efforts at the state and local levels, including the ability to track children across services and over time.

North Carolina's Early Childhood Data Advisory Council serves a meaningful and productive role in supporting data integration. The ECDAC joined states across the nation advancing data work through similar councils and became part of a national network. Without continued funding, NC loses the efficiency and forward movement only gained by this unique collaborative work. While the work generated by the ECDAC will be carried forward through its members and respective organizations, there will certainly be a slowing of advancements in data collection, integration, and visualization, informed decision-making without the ECDAC.

Philanthropic and public investment in maintaining the ECDAC will further the state’s ability to mobilize data to its fullest extent to inform investments that can yield the most significant outcomes for children, families, and the future of North Carolina.

Addendum

ECDAC Member/Participant List

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