

# Learning and Ready to Succeed Recommendations



## *Purpose of these recommendations:*

Children are surrounded by the support they need to learn and be ready to succeed.

*Click on the recommendation below to see the strategies to implement the recommendation; why this recommendation is important to our community; and the action plans for each strategy.*

<p><a href="#"><u>Recommendation 18</u></a></p>	<p>Invest in a sustainable child care system to provide high quality, culturally-affirming, and developmentally-appropriate early learning experiences that are affordable and accessible to all.</p>
<p><a href="#"><u>Recommendation 19</u></a></p>	<p>Develop a coordinated transition between early childhood education and elementary school that emphasizes developmentally-appropriate practice, exploration, and play.</p>
<p><a href="#"><u>Recommendation 20</u></a></p>	<p>Ensure children with developmental delays and/or disabilities learn in environments where they can thrive and their families have the support they need to advocate and care for their children.</p>
<p><a href="#"><u>Recommendation 21</u></a></p>	<p>Promote and support play and early literacy for young children starting at birth in partnership with parents, guardians, and caregivers.</p>

## Recommendation 18:

Invest in a Sustainable Child Care System to Provide High Quality, Culturally-Affirming, and Developmentally-Appropriate Early Learning Experiences that are Affordable and Accessible to All

### The Strategies to Implement This Recommendation

**STRATEGY 18.1:** Advocate for child care subsidy reforms that increase reimbursement rates and expand eligibility and affordability for families.

**STRATEGY 18.2:** Develop and pilot a local community awareness campaign about the critical role and value of early childhood education, across settings.

**STRATEGY 18.3:** Expand support for universal, affordable infant and toddler care.

**STRATEGY 18.4:** Secure additional investment in Durham PreK to ensure the program's sustainability and expand to 3 year olds.

### Why this Recommendation is Important to Our Community

#### Overview

Child care is a resource that is critical to both healthy child development and family economic security, but our child care system in Durham does not meet the needs of all families, especially families of color and families with low incomes. It is not universally affordable, accessible, developmentally-appropriate, or affirming of children across race, socio-economic status, and ability. A number of systemic factors, including persistent mental models about what child care is, who needs it, and the role that it plays in child development—as well as long-term under-investment—contribute to the problem.

#### Community Voices

“Efforts to ‘make visible’ Durham's early childhood education & care spaces (ex. children, educators, families, learning & care environments, the work happening there, etc.) to the rest of the community, such as through art installations, ad campaigns, etc.” - Durham parent

“How the heck is it 2020 and there are so few resources?! So many women have been forced to leave the workforce because of COVID. This is indicative of a greater problem which is that systems are not designed to support households with two working parents.” - Durham parent

"How can you get a job if you have no childcare? The social worker told me she found me daycare but that I have 2 weeks to find a job...but how if I have no childcare? Then the pandemic hit and all was lost. This is what I do not like about that system." - Durham parent  
"Emphasis on affordable truly high quality childcare. We make a relatively high income and should not be struggling like this." - Durham parent

### *Voices of the Durham ECAP Action Planning Team Who Worked on this Recommendation*

"As a group, we found that high quality early care and education is best sustained and accessed by the aforementioned strategies. Much of our conversation was around reimbursement to sites, including family child care homes, and eligibility criteria for assistance to pay for high quality child care. We feel like it is important to educate the community—families, decision makers, and funders—about the importance of high quality early care and education in order to work as a community with providers to increase subsidy reimbursement rates, to expand eligibility criteria for parents to access child care subsidy, and to increase accessibility for affordable infant and toddler care.

We agree with the Community Focus Groups that we must advocate for a shift in perception of Early Childhood Education and Childcare Programs, i.e. "not babysitters", to help lawmakers, policy makers, and the general public realize the important and lasting impact that this field has on children and families. This perception shift will improve the quality of care in countless ways, and it matters to young children, teachers, administrators, families, and everyone who is touched by these young children as they grow into adults who make choices based on their early experiences. We need to advocate for holding this field in high esteem and widely share research about the impact of high quality, developmentally-appropriate early childhood care."

- Early Care and Education Action Planning Team

## The Action Plans

**STRATEGY 18.1:** Advocate for child care subsidy reforms that increase reimbursement rates and expand eligibility and affordability for families.

*This strategy includes two main areas for advocacy: a. increasing child care subsidy reimbursement rates to public and private early care and education providers, including to family child care homes at comparable rates, and b. reassessing child care subsidy eligibility requirements and parent fees to expand eligibility and affordability. Increasing reimbursement rates is important because providers are expected to provide high quality but are not reimbursed at a high quality rate, and reimbursement rates should reflect the real cost of providing high-quality care. Durham providers have been advocating through grassroots groups with state lawmakers who set these rates but progress has been slow. Reassessing subsidy eligibility and parent fees is important because the current eligibility criteria exclude many families who need assistance paying for high quality child*

*care the most which in turn causes those families to choose lower quality care because that's what they can afford.*

<b>SHORT-TERM ACTION STEPS (1-2 years)</b>	<b>LONG-TERM ACTION STEPS (2+ years)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Use the <a href="#">Durham County Preschool Supply and Demand Study</a> to talk about how much high quality early care and education costs.<sup>1</sup></li> <li>● Hold some parent focus groups to better understand what their expectations of high quality are, and to understand their barriers to accessing subsidy; identify and compensate parent leaders who would be willing to advocate with decision makers.</li> <li>● Hold focus groups with early childhood educators and administrators to identify challenges associated with low reimbursement rates and strict subsidy eligibility criteria, and identify and compensate teachers and administrators who would be willing to advocate with decision-makers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Collaborate with the NC Child Care Coalition and other groups to leverage the voices of Durham parents and educators to amplify lobbying efforts around subsidy expansion and reform.</li> <li>● Meet with lawmakers who set the rates and eligibility criteria to discuss why the rates and eligibility criteria need to be reassessed and to advocate for increases in reimbursement rates and expanded eligibility.</li> </ul>
<b>MEASURING PROGRESS</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● All types of child care providers will be financially supported, taking pressure off of programs and creating a better working environment, program materials, and lower teacher turnover</li> <li>● More families will have access to high quality care</li> </ul>	
<b>BUILDING OFF EXISTING WORK</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● State and national advocacy efforts related to child care subsidy reform and expansion, including with NC Early Education Coalition, NC Justice Center, NC Child, MomsRising</li> <li>● Data and research efforts about child care subsidy from NC Early Childhood Foundation, Child Care Services Association, and others</li> </ul>	
<b>POTENTIAL PARTNERS</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Providers, families, Durham Social Services child care subsidy, advocacy groups, lawmakers</li> </ul>	

<p><b>STRATEGY 18.2:</b> Develop and pilot a local community awareness campaign about the critical role and value of early childhood education, across settings.</p>	
<p><i>This strategy focuses on better understanding and working to shift the mental models that make the problems of low funding and low respect for child care so entrenched. Child care will not be lifted up and strengthened until we can shift those perspectives. These are some of the mental models that we have identified, but there are more: child care as babysitting/unskilled/women's work; child care as primarily kindergarten preparation; play as separate from learning; family child care as inferior to center-based care; and family, friend, and neighbor care as unsafe/a choice of last resort.</i></p>	
<p><b>SHORT-TERM ACTION STEPS</b> (1-2 years)</p>	<p><b>LONG-TERM ACTION STEPS</b> (2+ years)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Identify and compensate a group of parents, caregivers, and early childhood educators/child care support staff that are interested in co-designing and leading this campaign.</li> <li>● Identify and contract with one or more people with expertise in work to shift public opinion/mental models.</li> <li>● Using focus groups and interviews, gather and analyze perspectives about how different kinds of people think about the role and value of child care. Identify the mental models that seem to be the most harmful and sticky.</li> <li>● Using that data, develop messaging for the community awareness campaign; identify messengers, ensuring that the voices of parents and early educators are central to the campaign.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Launch and evaluate the campaign.</li> </ul>
<p><b>MEASURING PROGRESS</b></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Child care in all of its forms will be better understood and supported for the roles it plays in healthy child development</li> <li>● The particular benefits of high-quality, licensed child care will be well-understood</li> <li>● Early childhood educators will be recognized, compensated, and sufficiently prepared and supported in the critical role they play in fostering healthy child development</li> <li>● Young children's learning will happen through play in developmentally-appropriate ways</li> </ul>	
<p><b>BUILDING OFF EXISTING WORK</b></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● NC Early Childhood Coalition's Think Babies NC advocacy and awareness work</li> <li>● Durham PreK, Child Care Services Association (CCSA), Durham's Partnership for Children (DPfC), Families and Communities Rising (FCR)</li> </ul>	

<b>POTENTIAL PARTNERS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Early childhood educators and administrators (from centers and Family Child Care Homes); parents; child care support and advocacy groups (CCSA, DPfC, FCR, MomsRising, etc.); Early Childhood Mental Health Taskforce Early Care and Education Sub-Committee</li> <li>● Elected officials and members of the Durham business community and large employers like Duke; Durham Chamber of Commerce</li> </ul>

<b>STRATEGY 18.3:</b> Expand support for universal, affordable infant and toddler care.
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*This is important because the first 2,000 days of a child’s life are the most important for their brain development.<sup>ii</sup> It also supports the parents by easing their role as sole caregiver, allowing them to work or pursue other needs outside of the home.*

<b>SHORT-TERM ACTION STEPS (1-2 years)</b>	<b>LONG-TERM ACTION STEPS (2+ years)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Research child and family outcomes and models for expanding access to free or low-cost infant/toddler care.</li> <li>● Identify and compensate a group of parents and early childhood educators/child care support staff, especially family child care providers since families are more likely to choose small settings when their children are youngest, to share their stories and support advocacy for more investment in infant toddler care.</li> <li>● Identify how American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars can be leveraged and advocate for the funding of a universal infant-toddler care program using research.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Cultivate early childhood funders for infant-toddler expansion grants.</li> <li>● Advocate for increase for subsidy reimbursement rates for infant toddler care as well as a subsidy priority for these children (for example, a separate waitlist).</li> </ul>

<b>MEASURING PROGRESS</b>
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- Local capacity will expand for infant/toddler care, and wait lists will be shorter
- Families and young children will be more supported and collectively cared for, reducing stress and poverty

<b>BUILDING OFF EXISTING WORK</b>
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- NC Early Childhood Coalition’s Think Babies NC advocacy and awareness work

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Durham PreK, Child Care Services Association, Durham's Partnership for Children, Families and Communities Rising</li> <li>● American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding</li> </ul>
<b>POTENTIAL PARTNERS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Durham PreK, Child Care Services Association, Families and Communities Rising and Durham's Partnership for Children</li> </ul>

<b>STRATEGY 18.4:</b> Secure additional investment in Durham PreK to ensure the program's sustainability and expand to 3 year olds.	
<i>Expanding Durham PreK (DPK) will increase access to high quality early childhood experiences for 3 and 4 yr olds. Beyond just expanding access, efforts to expand it will promote more diversity (economic, racial, and ethnic) in early childhood classrooms.</i>	
<b>SHORT-TERM ACTION STEPS (1-2 years)</b>	<b>LONG-TERM ACTION STEPS (2+ years)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Create accessible, clear cost models to share with funders and decision-makers about the costs associated with expansion and addressing barriers to access (transportation, before and after care); ensure these models include the “real cost of care,” including providing teacher benefits and higher wages.<sup>iii</sup></li> <li>● Establish a fund development subcommittee of Durham PreK to focus on increasing resources for program expansion through grant applications and proactive pitches to funders; this group should consider how to best leverage ARPA funds and advocate for that funding.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Develop a teacher pipeline plan, including efforts to compensate existing early childhood educators to complete the degrees and certifications they need and have access to mentorship from master teachers, so that DPK programs have access to highly-qualified candidates that reflect the students they serve; the plan should prioritize bringing in more educators with racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds of the children they are serving, as well as educators that speak the home languages of the students served.</li> <li>● Convene conversations with family child care homes (FCCH) to explore the possibility of having FCCHs participate in DPK, and to ensure that consequences of expansion of DPK doesn't have unintended consequences on FCCHs.</li> </ul>
<b>MEASURING PROGRESS</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Enrollment of 3 and 4-year-old children in Durham PreK will increase</li> </ul>	

- The number of child care sites participating in Durham PreK as pipeline sites or enrollment sites will increase
- DPK classrooms will become more diverse by class and race /ethnicity

***BUILDING OFF EXISTING WORK***

- Durham PreK
- Wake Pre-K and MECK PreK
- ARPA dollars and federal interest in expanding pre-K

***POTENTIAL PARTNERS***

- Durham PreK, Child Care Services Association, Durham's Partnership for Children, Families and Communities Rising, Durham Public Schools

## Recommendation 19: Develop A Coordinated Transition Between Early Childhood Education and Elementary School that Emphasizes Developmentally-Appropriate Practice, Exploration, and Play

### The Strategies to Implement This Recommendation

**STRATEGY 19.1:** Invest in the infrastructure to create a more integrated and aligned early childhood to K-12 system, working towards the existence of a comprehensive pre-K to 12 public school system.

**STRATEGY 19.2:** Strengthen the partnership between community partners, providers, families, and schools in order to facilitate an easier transition from home/pre-K to Kindergarten.

**STRATEGY 19.3:** Support schools in being “ready” to meet each child’s emotional and academic needs at Kindergarten entry and through the early grades, regardless of their early childhood education experiences, by emphasizing developmentally-appropriate and play-based learning.

### Why this Recommendation is Important to Our Community

#### Overview

The transition to Kindergarten is a critical one, and there are many missed opportunities to support families during that transition in Durham. Depending on the setting that a child is transitioning from, the family may have little knowledge about what to expect in Kindergarten, and the teacher may have little information about how to best support the child. Alongside strategies to address root causes of educational disparities like poverty and racism, there is more we can do in Durham to help children, families, and teachers be better supported in the transition to Kindergarten.

#### Community Voices

“Learning happens everywhere, and support for play, exploration, curiosity, and social interaction with peers/collaboration is beneficial for the child in that very moment, regardless of what’s next for them. We have to counteract narratives that children are in child care or preschool to “get ready” for kindergarten. Children need to be supported in their learning and exploration in the moment and age that they are, and when we do that, we see more developmentally-appropriate practice.” - Durham Early Childhood Educator

"I don't know hardly anything about the school system. I need support. And I don't really know where to go to find that information." - Durham parent

"Some children might be entering elementary school without ever having gone to a formal environment. It's not just preparing the child to be academically ready, but making sure the school is ready to meet the child where they are." - Durham Early Childhood Educator

"An extension of time to make the transition between PreK and kindergarten." - Durham parent

"Lack of alignment, communication, and collaboration between PreK and Kindergarten (teacher and provider level)." - ECAP participant

"Kindergarten environments in public school settings should follow developmentally appropriate practice and use a play-based curriculum. All personnel in school should be trained on how to interact with young children." - Durham Early Childhood Educator

### *Voices of the Durham ECAP Action Planning Team Who Worked on this Recommendation*

"The transition to kindergarten is one of the most significant events in a young child's life. Research shows that when a young child transitions successfully, they are more likely to enjoy school, show steady growth in academic and social skills, and have families who are more actively engaged.<sup>iv</sup> We know that all children can benefit from pre-K regardless of income or background. We are driven to create a truly universal approach that is grounded in equity and finds strength in collaboration between families, schools, and early care providers and other education stakeholders. As such it is important to create spaces for deliberate and intentional knowledge and resource sharing across systems and to further interrogate existing service gaps in order to remove barriers to access so that all families can be included in these spaces. A successful transition to Kindergarten support system also requires a commitment to socio-economic and racial equity, so that all families feel supported and have the tools and ability to thrive as they transition to school. Our team listened to and centered parents' desire for their children to thrive and succeed, for them to have a good foundation in life, and reap the benefits of a well-founded education. We believe that families should be able to trust that schools are ready to support them and their children in this endeavor."

- *Transition to Kindergarten Action Planning Team*

## The Action Plans

**STRATEGY 19.1:** Invest in the infrastructure to create a more integrated and aligned early childhood to K-12 system, working towards the existence of a comprehensive PreK-12 public school system.

*Access to a pre-K classroom supports families in their transition to school in many ways. For example, Head Start centers participate in transition to K activities throughout the year; families*

<p><i>can also become more familiar with the dynamics of teacher-parent relationships while children are exposed to more formal classrooms that prepare them for the transition, etc.</i></p>	
<p><b>SHORT-TERM ACTION STEPS (1-2 years)</b></p>	<p><b>LONG-TERM ACTION STEPS (2+ years)</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Understand and ensure alignment with existing plans towards expanding pre-K in public schools (adding two pre-K classrooms to every DPS elementary school).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Allocate funding for inclusion of universal pre-K that will be lasting and sustainable (including unconnected sites and family child care homes).</li> <li>● Identify and address barriers to accessing pre-K for families such as transportation for families, location density, before and after care access, etc.</li> <li>● In the long term as more preschool classes are added, DPS/Title 1 office should continue to prioritize pre-K assignments at a child's base school.</li> </ul>
<p><b>MEASURING PROGRESS</b></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Pre-K and K-3 education will show more attention to developmentally-appropriate practice</li> <li>● Pre-K classrooms in DPS schools will be better integrated into the school where they are located</li> <li>● Children and families will experience a warmer hand-off between pre-K and K, and better understand expectations of them and their rights</li> </ul>	
<p><b>BUILDING OFF EXISTING WORK</b></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Durham PreK, Durham's Campaign for Grade Level Reading, Durham Partnership for Children (DPfC) and Book Harvest Transition to K work</li> </ul>	
<p><b>POTENTIAL PARTNERS</b></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● NC InCK, Book Harvest transition to K work, Durham Public Schools, Office of Early Education, Board of Education, Head Start, Durham PreK/DPfC, private child care providers, family child care homes, County Commissioners, businesses that may be willing to partner, colleges and universities, medical and pediatric partners, families of preschool-age children</li> <li>● Building ongoing relationships and continuous involvement with families</li> </ul>	

<p><b>STRATEGY 19.2:</b> Strengthen the partnership between community partners, providers, families, and schools in order to facilitate an easier transition from home/pre-K to Kindergarten.</p>	
<p><i>We must break down silos between the multiple early learning environments and the Kindergarten classroom and in the process build a shared understanding of the importance of developmentally-appropriate education.</i></p>	
<p><b>SHORT-TERM ACTION STEPS (1-2 years)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Transition for the Community: Actively fund and sustain the coordination of already existing Kindergarten Transition supports in the community and school system.</li> <li>● Transition for Families: Invest in formal and informal opportunities for families and their children to get to know schools and share their own culturally relevant practices that support the transition. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ensure efforts are grounded in data collection honoring parent voices to ensure families are supported and can guide the work, like Village of Wisdom's parent researcher model, Empowered Parents in Community's Parents of African American Children groups (PAACs).</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>LONG-TERM ACTION STEPS (2+ years)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Build off of the <a href="#">Ready Schools framework</a> to create community and school based teams who have defined roles, MOUs, and are easily accessible to teachers/schools as support teams throughout the transition to Kindergarten.<sup>v</sup></li> </ul>
<p><b>MEASURING PROGRESS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Families will be more empowered and prepared to transition to Kindergarten successfully no matter what their previous school experiences are</li> <li>● Schools/teachers will have increased capacity to engage families and students when children arrive to Kindergarten</li> </ul>	
<p><b>BUILDING OFF EXISTING WORK</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Durham Partnership for Children's (DPfC) Transition to Kindergarten (TTK) initiative and their Transition Teams</li> </ul>	
<p><b>POTENTIAL PARTNERS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● DCI's Stepping Stones camp, Durham Partnership for Children Transition to Kindergarten program, Book Harvest transition to school, Village of Wisdom, Durham Public Schools initiatives, ISLA programs, Durham Public Schools' personnel, early childhood educators</li> </ul>	

**STRATEGY 19.3:** Support schools in being “ready” to meet each child’s emotional and academic needs at Kindergarten entry and through the early grades, regardless of their early childhood education experiences, by emphasizing developmentally-appropriate and play-based learning.

*While there is much we can do to prepare children academically, developmentally, socially, and emotionally for Kindergarten, it is also critical to better prepare all Kindergarten classrooms to meet the varied needs of 5-year-olds.*

**SHORT-TERM ACTION STEPS (1-2 years)**

- Provide information, support and opportunities for pre-K and kindergarten teachers to learn about and engage around the transition (professional development, networking, learning opportunities to emphasize the importance of social-emotional learning and play-based learning).
- Create and support spaces for professional collaboration between early childhood educators, including providers from family child care, unconnected, private, and public classrooms.
- Consider how well the Community Schools model is working in Durham and make improvements where needed.

**LONG-TERM ACTION STEPS (2+ years)**

- Support (including more funding) schools in developing and implementing developmentally appropriate practices in Kindergarten and early grade classrooms that emphasize learning through play, social emotional learning, outdoor learning, and de-center assessment; ensure that classrooms are staffed well to support this shift and that the voices of the pre-K to 3rd grade teachers and instructional assistants are lifted up in determining how to best prioritize and institutionalize these practices.
- If useful, expand the Community Schools model to more schools, ensuring staffing by folks who understand the unique need and strengths of their school.
  - Ensure there is personnel that is specifically trained to support children with various needs as they transition to Kindergarten (Community School Coordinator at school level and/or Kindergarten Transition Coordinator at district level).

**MEASURING PROGRESS**

- Children, teachers, and families will be less frustrated because children are being better supported and the expectations of them are clear and appropriate for their stage of development
- Children will be thriving in classrooms

**BUILDING OFF EXISTING WORK**

**Grown in Durham: Durham County's Early Childhood Action Plan (ECAP)**

[Document Revised: September 2021]

- Community Schools model (see [this link](#) for data/case studies for the Community Schools Model and examples of the model in action)
- NC Early Childhood Foundation and NC Child's work on social-emotional learning, EarlyWell
- Durham PreK

**POTENTIAL PARTNERS**

- [Community Schools models](#) locally in Durham, like Lakewood Elementary School

## Recommendation 20:

### Ensure Children with Developmental Delays or Disabilities Learn in Environments Where They Can Thrive and Their Families Have the Support They Need to Advocate and Care for Their Children

#### The Strategies to Implement This Recommendation

**STRATEGY 20.1:** Promote true inclusivity and integration for children with developmental delays, disabilities, and other high support needs in early learning experiences through a needs assessment on the State of Inclusion in Durham.

#### Why this Recommendation is Important to Our Community

##### Overview

True inclusion for children with developmental delays and/or disabilities is critical in all environments, however parents shared their specific challenges finding early care and education programs that are ready to meet the needs of their children and include their children in the learning space. They also expressed that they wished that early care and education programs were more aware of how to support their children with special needs but also how to help identify needs early to facilitate referral to intervention programs.

There is currently a lack of sufficient data to define and hold ourselves accountable in meeting the needs and preferences of these young children and their families. This includes a lack of comprehensive data on the current state of early childhood inclusion (and exclusion). In order to provide direct, individualized support to each child and support child care sites to meet children's needs, Durham needs evidence-informed strategies to promote and facilitate inclusion.

##### Community Voices

"Better funding/research based training about disability inclusion in all school settings (leads to better inclusion in community settings)." - Durham Parent

"Not needing to fight for basic needs for people with disabilities." - Durham parent

"Preschool teachers especially head start more equipped to care for and educate children With delays." - Durham parent

"Parents who already have it in their mind what to look for are able to get into the referral and care system to get diagnosed quicker. I wish more parents knew what to look for earlier

to get their children the help they need." - Durham parent

"Education for parents and teachers for how to get interventions for issues like speech." - Durham parent

"More programs for special needs children and their families." - Durham parent

"Children with disability/special needs summer care. This is extremely hard for families to access." - Durham parent

### *Voices of the Durham ECAP Action Planning Team Who Worked on this Recommendation*

"This recommendation is very important to our group because there is a lack of knowledge and information that is being given out to families with and without children with disabilities. We need to be equipped with the right tools for facilities to better do their jobs while allowing parents to be at ease when leaving their child or children. We must implement better strategies for our families and the community in general. The team continuously emphasizes in our discussions that more resources need to be available and a more intensive way of actually reaching the community. Without reaching out to most of the community, it becomes difficult to have adequate data to go by. Different groups are already formed in the Durham areas that would be beneficial for us to network with to ensure the right people are getting the information to make a difference in so many families' lives. "

- *Inclusion for Children with Developmental Delays and/or Disabilities Action Planning Team*

## The Action Plan

**STRATEGY 20.1:** Promote true inclusivity and integration for children with developmental delays, disabilities, and other high support needs in early learning experiences through a needs assessment on the State of Inclusion in Durham.

**Initiative title:** *Needs Assessment on the State of Inclusion in Durham*

**Purpose:** *To gather comprehensive data on the current state of early childhood inclusion (and exclusion) in Durham in order to be able to move forward with evidence-informed strategies to promote and facilitate inclusion. The ultimate goal is to provide direct, individualized supports to each child and to support child care sites to be able to meet the needs of each child.*

**Rationale:** *It is imperative that we implement purposeful and intentional strategies for gathering inclusion data specific to Durham. Without this data, we lack the accountability necessary to define how we can best ensure that the needs and preferences of young children with high support needs and/or disabilities, and their families, are met. It is important to identify policies and practices that may create barriers to the meaningful inclusion of all young children. Everyone in our group has, in some way, encountered the spaces and places that do not consider, or outright exclude, children with disabilities and/or high support needs in early education settings--and, together, we seek to propose a solution.*

<b>Research question:</b> <i>What is the current state of inclusion policy, practice, function, and capacity in Durham's early childhood learning contexts?</i>	
<b>SHORT-TERM ACTION STEPS (1-2 years)</b>	<b>LONG-TERM ACTION STEPS (2+ years)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Conduct a comprehensive needs assessment: Observe, assess, and describe the state of inclusivity in preschools and childcare sites (centers and family child care homes) to determine how many children with disabilities and/or high support needs are being served in Durham, and how they are being served in various settings.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Assemble a taskforce to examine the state of inclusion in Durham.</li> <li>○ Create a stakeholder engagement plan.</li> <li>○ Create a needs assessment plan to gather data in an equitable, efficient, and comprehensive way.</li> <li>○ Employ the community to assist with data collection.</li> <li>○ Explore and analyze data; share preliminary findings with stakeholders.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Consider data to be included, for example:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Existence of set-aside or special funding, and amounts, for inclusion.</li> <li>○ Equipment or assistive technology.</li> <li>○ Ongoing training, professional development opportunities, or other credentials for staff on teaching, caring for children with disabilities and/or high support needs, inclusionary methods and curriculum.</li> <li>○ Lived experience of people with disabilities (children, staff, family members) and the teachers and support staff that work with them; this should include families whose children are currently enrolled in child care, and who have either been excluded or who chosen to withdraw or opt out of formal child care settings.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Create an implementation plan to implement strategies that support children, families, and child care sites. (How will interventions/strategies be selected?)</li> <li>● Develop recommendations according to the data and implementation plan. Align with <a href="#">DPS Strategic Plan</a> and <a href="#">Durham County Strategic Plan</a>.</li> <li>● Prepare and present a report with findings and recommendations to share with stakeholders and the community.</li> <li>● Assemble an implementation team to initiate action on recommendations.</li> <li>● Implement work to ensure that children with disabilities receive the individualized supports they need and the childcare sites are supported in serving each child.</li> <li>● With the support of implementation science experts, an implementation team should conduct a follow-up assessment after 3 years to determine what improvements have been made to increase and improve inclusivity.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Efforts to share resources and services with families.</li> <li>○ Services and therapies provided on site, (e.g., occupational therapy).</li> <li>○ Number of children with disabilities and/or high support needs enrolled.</li> <li>○ Documentation utilized to keep records on children's medical history.</li> <li>○ Documentation utilized to assist teachers/staff with better supporting and individualizing instruction for children throughout their day.</li> <li>○ Accommodations the establishment is making to support the success and full inclusion of their students with disabilities and/or high support needs.</li> <li>○ Existence of working relationships with organizations that provide supportive services like technical assistance (ex. CDSA).</li> <li>○ Qualitative data through surveys and focus groups with family members.</li> <li>○ Use the <a href="#">Inclusive Classroom Profile</a> as a valid and reliable assessment tool.<sup>vi</sup></li> </ul>	
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**MEASURING PROGRESS**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Families will feel comfortable taking their child or children to any early childhood setting without fear of the site being able or willing to meet their needs</li> <li>● Inclusive classrooms will be thriving and meaningfully engaging for all children and families</li> <li>● All children will be fully-included in the school or early care and education community</li> <li>● Accountability and support measures will be in place</li> <li>● Opportunities for all students to interact/learn/play together will increase</li> <li>● There will be affirmative action for children with disabilities and/or high support needs</li> <li>● More schools and childcare providers will require general education teachers and staff to complete (compensated) trainings and professional development on inclusion</li> <li>● More early childhood educators will be using innovative inclusion facilitation strategies</li> <li>● Educational and awareness supports for families with children with disabilities and/or high support needs will be available at agencies like the Child Care Services Association (CCSA), at single-stop sites, and in the hands of peer navigators</li> </ul>
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- The number of Durham child care sites that use the Inclusive Children Profile on an ongoing basis will increase
- Ongoing professional development on inclusion for early childhood educators will be provided
- Support, incentives, resources for providers to maintain American Disability Act (ADA) compliance (and beyond) will be provided

### **BUILDING OFF EXISTING WORK**

- The [Inclusive Classroom Profile](#) as a valid and reliable assessment tool
- [Infant-Toddler Program](#) run by the [Children's Developmental Services Agency](#) (CDSA) provides supports and services for families and their children, birth to three who have high support needs
- Durham Public Schools
  - Exceptional Children (EC) [services](#) for K-12 and for 4-year olds through [Title I pre-kindergarten program](#)
  - The DPS EC support group of community partners
  - The DPS Child Find process that helps to identify children with high support needs
- [Durham Special Needs Advisory Council](#) (DSNAC)
- The [Local Interagency Coordinating Council](#) (LICC) which includes providers and parents working together to make sure that all families know about early intervention services

### **POTENTIAL PARTNERS**

#### **Potential Early Childhood Inclusion Taskforce Members:** *(with stipends for parents and community members)*

- Parents and caregivers
- Preschools and childcare directors and educators
- Durham Public Schools administration and teachers
- Pediatricians
- Duke Center on Child and Family Policy, outside experts
- Durham Special Needs Advisory Council (DSNAC)
- Daycare Quality Control Manager for Durham
- Members of the ECAP Inclusion for Children with Developmental Delays and/or Disabilities Action Planning Team

#### **Other Potential Implementation and Funding Partners:**

- Board of Education and Durham County
- Frank Porter Graham - NIRN ([National Implementation Resource Network](#)), experts on implementation science and processes in early childhood spaces

- Durham Public Schools
- Duke Center on Child and Family Policy
- Child Development Services Agency (CDSA)
- Child Care Services Association (CCSA)
- Black Families Learning Meetup (Joy Lampkin Foster)

### **Additional Strategies to Consider in Future Planning**

- Expand access to early screenings and interventions to identify developmental delays, disabilities, and other special healthcare needs as soon as possible.
- Support the work and center the experiences of families who are already advocating for their children with developmental delays, disabilities, and other special healthcare needs in Durham Public Schools.
- Durham Public Schools: Create a plan to create and implement classrooms for 3-year-old students that are blended classrooms of students with disabilities and typically developing peers.
- Ensure that existing Diversity Equity and Inclusion funding and initiatives explicitly include children with disabilities and/or high support needs.

## Recommendation 21:

### Promote and Support Play and Early Literacy for Young Children Starting at Birth in Partnership with Parents, Guardians and Caregivers

#### The Strategies to Implement This Recommendation

**STRATEGY 21.1:** Engage, empower, and build capacity of parents, guardians, and caregivers to support children's early literacy development and play outside the classroom from birth.

**STRATEGY 21.2:** Expand, amplify, and strengthen research-based, play-based early literacy initiatives in school, child care, and community settings to strengthen community impact.

**STRATEGY 21.3:** Ensure that the single stop shop and peer navigators recommended in the Recommendation 3 ('resource awareness and service navigation') provide parents with foundational knowledge about early childhood development and early literacy and the importance of those resources that are available.

#### Why this Recommendation is Important to Our Community

##### Overview

Learning for children begins in utero and continues from birth. In order to help address disparities in educational outcomes for children, alongside strategies to address issues like poverty and racism, families and caregivers need to be supported to understand the role that they play in their children's learning and the importance of enriching experiences from birth.

##### Community Voices

"Parents are the first educators of our children which is why we have a difficult task but very important so that we can have future generations raised in a healthy and clean home." - Durham parent

"We have Book Harvest giving children all over Durham free books because we know the value of early reading." - Durham parent

"One thing that stands out is the eroding of play and how crucial that is to learning. Sometimes there's a sense that play isn't tied to early literacy, but it definitely is." - Durham Public Schools K-3 Teacher

**Voices of the Durham ECAP Action Planning Team Who Worked on this Recommendation**

“The importance of positive early childhood experiences is well documented. The development of children in their first five years of life are incredibly important. All caregivers play an important role in the young child’s life. Parents are committed to their young child’s positive development and to helping them reach the goal of being a reader.

Although a child may not become a proficient reader until the early grades (as is developmentally appropriate), early literacy begins at birth.<sup>vii</sup> As a baby matures, they develop important early skills that are the foundation for becoming successful readers.<sup>viii</sup> Language development milestones (babbling, cooing, mirroring, and so on) and engagement with books and stories are foundational early literacy skills. Early literacy also includes but is not limited to the child’s home learning environment, development of oral language (expressive and receptive), alphabetic knowledge, phonemic awareness, and print knowledge and concepts.

As a community, we cannot reach this goal without the engagement and commitment of families and caregivers of young children from birth. Our own experiences as mothers and professionals connected to many families in the community show us the importance of early literacy. We value centering and strengthening families within the systems that support the development of young children from birth.

**How we define early literacy:** Encouragement of reading (aloud/narration), emergent writing, and phonological development. Underlying these is the promotion of language, motor, cognitive, and social development. In addition, promoting a love of reading.”

- Early Literacy Action Planning Team

**The Action Plans**

<p><b>STRATEGY 21.1:</b> Engage, empower, and build capacity of parents, guardians, and caregivers to support children’s early literacy development and play outside the classroom from birth.</p>	
<p><i>The family is the first place where children learn and it's important to involve them. With them, facilitate strategies and methods to ensure better child development in all the areas and to create solidarity and an equitable community.</i></p>	
<p><b>SHORT-TERM ACTION STEPS</b> (1-2 years)</p>	<p><b>LONG-TERM ACTION STEPS</b> (2+ years)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Identify and lift up the strategies and cultural practices parents are already using to support their child’s early literacy; build these into peer learning and peer support approaches to promoting early literacy.</li> <li>● Invest in (finance) fun and enriching family experiences that promote early literacy and vocabulary development.</li> </ul>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ask families what experiences they would be most interested in and how they are already supporting early literacy in the home to guide programming.</li> <li>○ Although these experiences should happen outside the classroom, schools can be an important community hub for families to have these experiences even before their child attends school—for example, <a href="#">Kaleidoscope Play and Learn</a> groups bring families to their neighborhood school to learn and play together.<sup>ix</sup></li> <li>● Promote the importance of talking, playing, and singing in the development of babies’, toddlers’, and young children’s early literacy skills and development.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Consider a communications campaign about the importance of talking and serve and return; consider establishing a local <a href="#">Talking is Teaching</a> campaign or <a href="#">Boston Basics</a>.<sup>xxi</sup></li> <li>○ Emphasize how important the child’s home language development from birth is to a strong reading foundation.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Support adult literacy programs, book clubs, family learning spaces, etc. for parents and caregivers in their preferred language.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Important to provide simultaneous childcare programming that is rich in literacy and free to support parents in accessing such programs.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
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**MEASURING PROGRESS**

- Families will feel empowered as their child’s first teacher and confident in their ability to support literacy development through the things they are already doing and in new ways
- Parents will recognize new opportunities to facilitate and support early learning

**BUILDING OFF EXISTING WORK**

- Boston Basics, Talking is Teaching, Kaleidoscope Play and Learns
- Book Babies, Healthy Families Durham, DCI story hours
- Durham County Library story hours and programming
- Reach Out and Read at Duke clinics

**POTENTIAL PARTNERS**

- Parents, families, Empowered Parents in Community, we are, ISLA, El Centro, Book Babies and Book Harvest, Lincoln and other pediatric offices, OB offices to reach expecting families, ISLA, Cooperative Extension’s L/PFAST program, Durham Literacy Center, Durham County Library, other orgs that provide “training” and support to parents

<p><b>STRATEGY 21.2:</b> Expand, amplify, and strengthen research-based, play-based early literacy initiatives in school, child care, and community settings to strengthen community impact.</p>	
<p><i>There are many helpful programs to support early literacy in Durham and they need additional investment to scale and serve more families.</i></p>	
<p><b>SHORT-TERM ACTION STEPS (1-2 years)</b></p>	<p><b>LONG-TERM ACTION STEPS (2+ years)</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provide additional training in early literacy concepts and activities for early childhood educators (Birth-K), caregivers, and families.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Emphasis on developmentally and age appropriate practices (learning through play, conversation with caregivers, singing, etc.) that promote early literacy in home learning environments and other community learning environments.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Identify and facilitate access to community programs and research based literacy initiatives.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Some examples of existing programs in Durham: Reach Out and Read, Book Babies (a Book Harvest program), Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, DCI- LEAP academy, Durham PreK, Jumpstart (Duke based team).</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
<p><b>MEASURING PROGRESS</b></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Caregivers of young children will better understand the importance of early literacy and can provide rich early literacy experiences</li> <li>● More families will have access to more fun opportunities to support their child's early literacy development outside the home, and build community with others families</li> <li>● More families of young children from birth will be able to create literacy rich environments that promote early literacy skills</li> </ul>	
<p><b>BUILDING OFF EXISTING WORK</b></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Durham PreK, Reach Out and Read, Book Harvest Book Babies, DCA's Jumpstart program</li> <li>● Child Care Service Association's technical assistance providers and coaches</li> <li>● we are and Empowered Parents in Community's new early childhood-focused roles</li> </ul>	
<p><b>POTENTIAL PARTNERS</b></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Caregivers, early childhood professionals, early childhood program directors, families, experts/teachers/volunteers who can support in training, Book Babies program at Book</li> </ul>	

Harvest, Reach Out and Read program, Durham PreK, Talking is Teaching campaign, we are, EPiC, Black Families Storytime Meetup (Joy Lampkin Foster)

**STRATEGY 21.3:** Ensure that the single stop shop and peer navigators recommended in the Recommendation 3 ('resource awareness and service navigation') provide parents with foundational knowledge about early childhood development and early literacy and the importance of those resources that are available.

*No matter where a family searches, they should be able to find the required/necessary services and supports, and information about early literacy is an important component of that. A physical space is important for the community to come together for training, learning opportunities, and activities, mentoring, and tutoring for children. This space presents an opportunity to create avenues for additional knowledge sharing with families about early literacy, child development, and the importance of play.*

**SHORT-TERM ACTION STEPS (1-2 years)**

- Develop clear information about and strengthen connections between the network of wrap-around family services and supports (see: recommendation 3). This network should include representation from child care providers, after school and extra-curricular programs, as well as other community programs that support and impact the development of early literacy.
- Develop and implement a plan to train the staff engaged in peer navigation and single stops (see: recommendation 3) with the appropriate information about child development, early literacy, and the importance of play.

**LONG-TERM ACTION STEPS (2+ years)**

- Identify an existing site to serve as a central space, a physical location, where this network can be housed and be actively accessed by families (see: recommendation 3).

**MEASURING PROGRESS**

- An accessible, broad reaching site and network of family services that families use regularly will be created
- Families will have more access to knowledge about how to support their child's development, early literacy, and play

**BUILDING OFF EXISTING WORK**

- NCCare360, NC InCK, Durham System of Care, programs using community health workers

## POTENTIAL PARTNERS

- Child care providers, Durham Partnership for Children, DPS Foundation, Durham PreK, DPS/public schools, WG Pearson Center- Student U, Village of Wisdom, Durham County Social Services, El Centro Hispano, El Futuro, afterschool programs, Welcome Baby, 4H programming, any organization that provides services to families with young children, NCCARE360/311, Lincoln Community Health Center pediatric clinics

For questions about this report, please contact Bonnie Delaune at [bonnie.delaune@dc-nc.org](mailto:bonnie.delaune@dc-nc.org) or Cate Elander at [celander@dconc.gov](mailto:celander@dconc.gov).

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