

OUR EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM IN DURHAM COUNTY

VISION: We envision an early childhood system as a whole that is aligned, sustainable, accessible, and values the expertise and leadership of the communities caring for children.

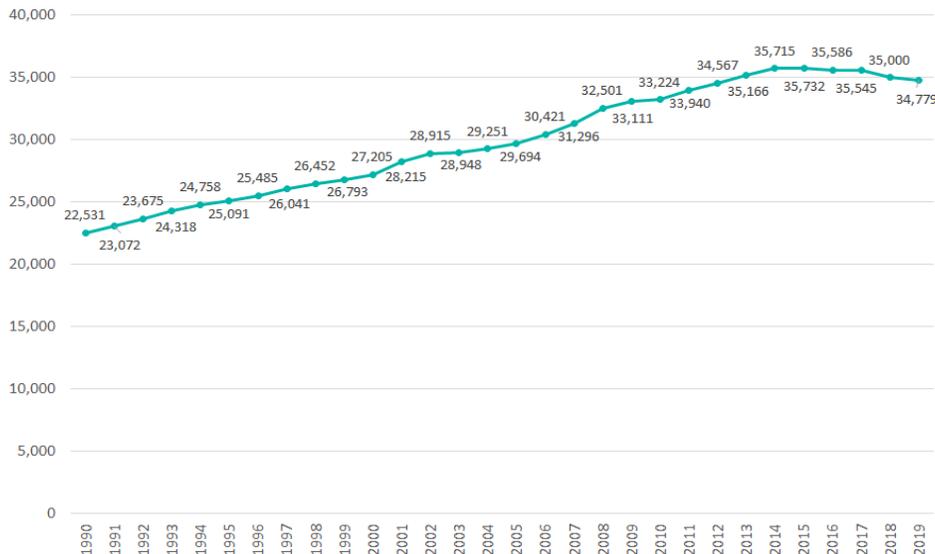
Durham County's **early childhood system** refers to the network of people, institutions and resources that support child health, basic needs, family and community wellbeing, and early learning. This system "includes all the places and people that influence the experiences of children, prenatal to age eight, and their families."ⁱ



These places may include a child's home and neighborhood, Family Child Care Homes (FCCH) and centers, elementary schools, public parks, hospitals, and more. The people may include family members, friends, child care educators, doctors, nurses, doulas, teachers, therapists, social workers and more. All of these people and places that influence young children and their families in Durham, also exist within a broader historical, social and political context.

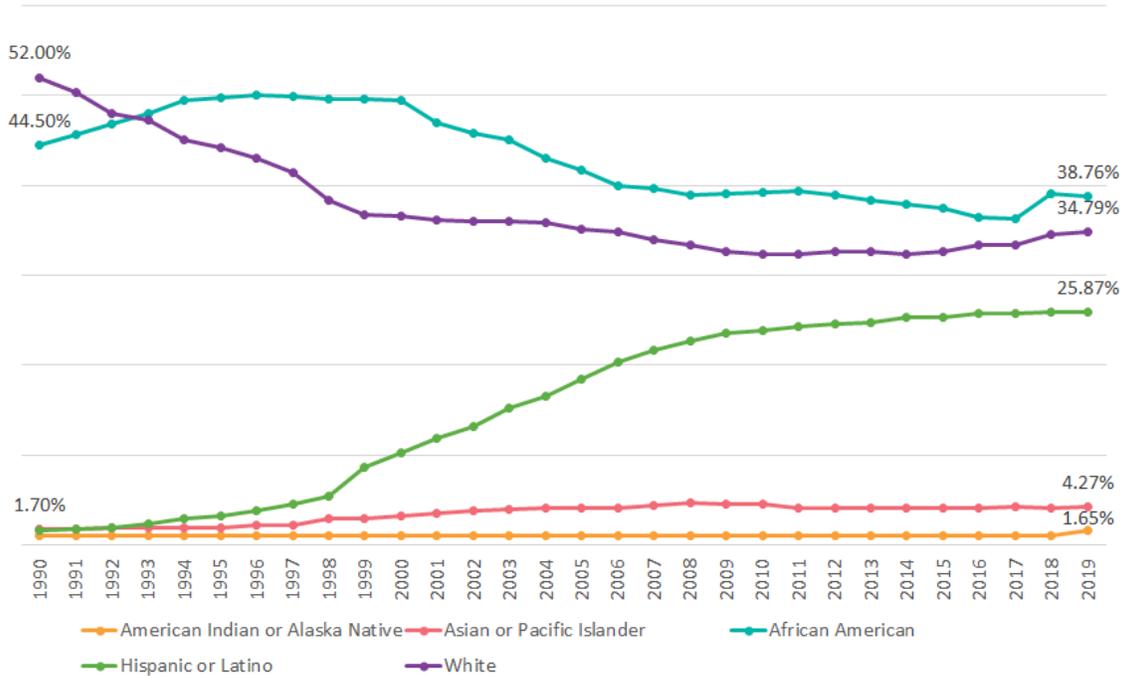
The early childhood system supports the nearly 35,000 children from birth through age 8 in Durham. The population of young children in Durham has been hovering close to 35,000 for the last decade.

Figure 1: Population of Children Aged 0-8 in Durham Countyⁱⁱ



The demographic makeup of those children have changed significantly in the past several decades, from majority white and Black (52.00% and 44.50%) in 1990 to majority Black, white, and Hispanic (38.76%, 34.79% and 35.87%, respectively) in 2019.

Figure 2: Population of Children Aged 0-8 in Durham County by Race/Ethnicityⁱⁱⁱ



Through the ECAP planning process, we explored the **strengths** of our early childhood system that will help us meet the NC ECAP goal areas; the **challenges** that we need to address in order to meet the NC ECAP goal areas; and the **opportunities** to take action to strengthen our early childhood system in Durham in order to meet the Durham ECAP goal areas.

The following sections ([“Our Family Support System,”](#) [“Our Maternal and Child Health System,”](#) and [“Our Early Learning System”](#)) include system overviews that explore these strengths and challenges as identified through available data, findings from community and parent outreach, and lived and professional experience of ECAP participants. These are not comprehensive, but summarize themes that have been identified during the past year of ECAP conversations with parents and providers. There are selected quotes from parents throughout that speak to each strength or challenge. The quotes you see are from focus groups and from the parent survey, but the voices of parents who are marginalized are highlighted in particular.

The first chapter explores the strengths and challenges of our early childhood system as a whole across 6 key themes. These strengths and challenges exist across our health system, family support system, and early learning system.

- **Early Childhood System:** The system of people, institutions and resources that support child health, basic needs, family and community wellbeing, and early learning.

The following 3 chapters explore particular parts of our early childhood system:

- **Family Support System:** The system of people, institutions, and resources that support families' social-emotional health and access to basic needs in a society that does not allocate resources equitably. This system is supposed to help ensure that all families have their **basic needs met** and that all children are **safe and nurtured**.
- **Maternal and Child Health System:** The system of people, institutions and resources that support family and child health. This system is supposed to help to ensure that all children in Durham are **healthy**.
- **Early Learning System:** The system of people, institutions, and resources that support a child's early learning and brain development. This system is supposed to help ensure that all children are **learning and ready to succeed**.

Themes from Across Durham's Early Childhood System

- **THEME 1:** Focusing on Root Causes Behind Disparities in Early Childhood Outcomes
- **THEME 2:** Centering Parents and Communities with Lived Experience as Experts
- **THEME 3:** Supporting Families within Context of Cultures and Communities
- **THEME 4:** Building Awareness About and Investment in Supports during Early Childhood
- **THEME 5:** Strengthening the Network of Services, Programs, and Resources Available to Families
- **THEME 6:** Communication and Collaboration Within Durham's Early Childhood System

THEME 1: FOCUSING ON ROOT CAUSES BEHIND DISPARITIES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD OUTCOMES

Primary takeaway: In order to see significant improvement in persistent disparities in early childhood outcomes, we must tackle racism and poverty directly.

The disparities we see in outcomes like infant mortality, child homelessness, and 3rd grade reading scores^{iv} are downstream results of unjust economic, political, social and cultural systems. Children live within the context of their families and their communities, and we cannot begin to change outcomes for kids without acknowledging the oppressive mental models, systems, policies and culture that continue to uphold white supremacy - at the expense of our children.

Experiencing racism during childhood, in and of itself, is an adverse childhood experience that negatively impacts child development.^v **42.2%** of Durham residents surveyed in the 2017 Durham County Community Health Assessment identified discrimination and racism as one of the five most important factors that has the biggest impact on quality of life and health in Durham County.^{1 vi} As Jannah Bierens, Durham resident and Health Education Specialist, describes, "Race is not biologically real, yet it has very real impacts on populations of color. Therefore, race is not the risk factor, racism is."^{vii} The impacts of systemic racism contribute to a higher allostatic load (also known as toxic stress, or "weathering") for families of color, especially Black families.^{viii} This ongoing stress can put families at higher risk for negative mental and physical health outcomes, and can also increase the risk of other adverse childhood experiences.^{ix x xi}

Parents have uplifted strategies throughout the Durham ECAP to disrupt racism in classrooms,² in early care and education policy,³ within our early childhood organizations themselves⁴ and more.

Poverty is another root cause at the foundation of every disparity we see. There are very few challenges in our early childhood system that parents experience equally regardless of income. 46% of Durham County's young children aged 0-6 live below 200 percent of the federal poverty level.^{xii} Children from families living in poverty are much more likely to have worse health, developmental, social, and educational outcomes, and because of systemic racism, BIPOC

¹ The findings in the Community Health Assessment's [2020 survey](#) "differ from the 2016 survey. Poverty, substance use, cancer or racism and discrimination were not among the top three in any categories."

² See the [Durham ECAP Report](#) "6c. Safe and Nurtured Recommendations," Recommendation 15.

³ See [Durham ECAP Reports](#) "6a. Systems Strengthening Recommendations," Recommendation 2 and "6e. Learning and Ready Recommendations," Recommendation 18.

⁴ See [Durham ECAP Report](#) "6a. Systems Strengthening Recommendations," Recommendation 1.

families are more likely to live in poverty. 37% of young children aged 0-8 who are Black and 36% who are Hispanic live in homes at or below the poverty level; whereas only 8% of young white children in Durham live in poverty.^{xiii}

Child poverty is not inevitable. As stated by Ezra Klein in a recent opinion piece for the NYT, “we rarely admit that America’s high rate of poverty is a policy choice, and there are reasons we choose it over and over again.”^{xiv} America’s economy depends on class stratification and racism to justify the hierarchy of American capitalism and resulting income inequality.⁵ In Durham, we must acknowledge our collective role in reinforcing a society in which childhood poverty continues to exist. Understanding the permanent impacts that toxic stress in the early years can have on child brain development is one of the compelling cases for addressing poverty and racism as early childhood issues.^{xv}

“Tackling poverty and racism, which are at the heart of the inequities we see.” - ECAP participant

“Too much blame on parents, and not enough blame on system for creating these inequities.” - ECAP participant

“Existing systems do not work.” - ECAP participant

Strengths

Acknowledging Systemic Racism at the Highest Levels

Due to the hard work of community leaders and organizers, Durham County has [declared racism a public health crisis](#), an important first step in acknowledging the harmful impacts of racism and the need for financial and other resources to address racism as a communicable disease.^{xvi}

There are also some important, high-ranking positions that have been added to Durham institutions specifically tasked with addressing inequities. Durham Public Schools now has an Executive Director for Equity Affairs and Durham County has a Racial Equity Officer. The City Council commissioned a Racial Equity Taskforce to [develop a report](#) with recommendations to improve equity in Durham, and the School Board, City Council, and Board of County Commissioners have all voted to establish a Racial Equity Commission in Durham to implement their recommendations.^{xvii}

⁵ See analysis by [Neighborhood Funders Group](#) for more discussion on the reciprocal relationship between racism and capitalism. "Kendi continued by discussing how the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade allowed for the massive accumulation of wealth in Europe and the Americas. Centuries of wage theft, trading in human bondage, insurance claims on "lost" cargo, and reparations for slave owners after emancipation entrenched this capitalist system with inequities based on race built into it. Slave owners protected their concentrated wealth by shaping our socio-economic and legal systems to benefit themselves and the industry of slavery, as well as limit democracy."

There Are Many Strong Racial Equity Trainings and Resources in the Community

People expressed support and appreciation for resources in the community like Racial Equity Institute, the Racial Equity Commission, and working to extend anti-racist education (we are) trainings, as well as the increasing number of BIPOC-led, community-rooted groups working on issues like education and maternal health in our community. Groups like Village of Wisdom, Empowered Parents in Community, ISLA, Communities in Partnership, HEARTS, MAAME, Equity Before Birth, and others were lifted up regularly as strengths.

Challenges

Focusing on Incremental Changes Rather than Deeper, Structural Change

Our early childhood system in Durham is rich in resources, especially related to programs that support young children and families. While these programs can be highly effective in helping a family feel more supported or a child be better prepared for school, they often are not able to help shift the conditions that hold problems like poverty and racism in place. As we discussed above, unless those root cause issues are addressed directly, we are unlikely to see significant change. After all, as the old adage goes, “the system is perfectly designed to get the outcomes it intended.” The systems and structures in place are not inevitable and can, and should, be questioned and challenged.

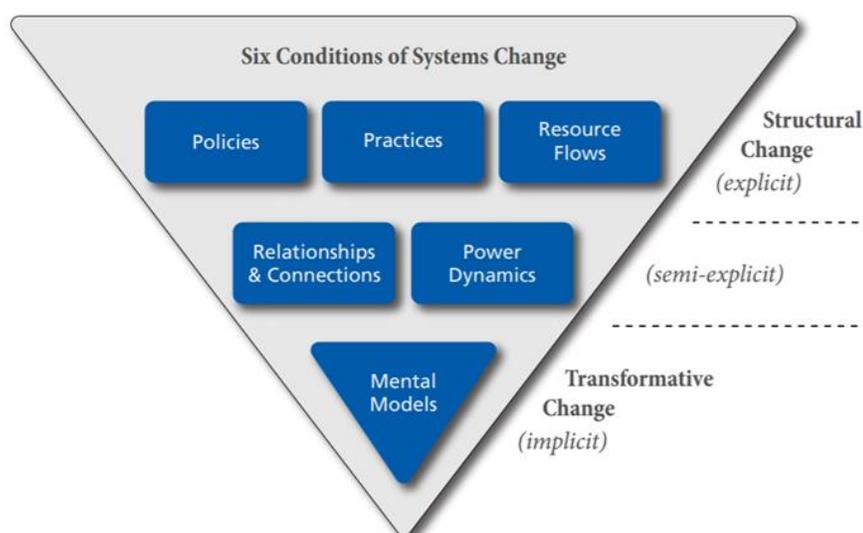


Figure 3: Shifting the Conditions That Hold the Problem in Place
Source: FSG, “[The Waters of Systems Change](#).” Accessed July, 2021.

As shown in figure 3, early childhood system change does require changing the conditions that hold the problem in place. This is not just about adjusting policies and practice, but also about deeply analyzing and recognizing the way that resource flows, relationships and power dynamics keep the problems in place. This requires facing and recognizing our own power within these systems and how we benefit from the current conditions. The greatest challenge is shifting mental models. We cannot achieve equity by operating within larger systems that are implicitly (or even explicitly) white supremacist, patriarchal, and classist.

“Because they are easier to implement, we are still often focused on programmatic solutions to systemic problems” - ECAP participant

"I worry that when we go straight to [increasing] funding, the system sits up and says, 'yes, we'll do it,' and we get the same results." - Durham Early Childhood Educator

"Sometimes in early childhood systems work we avoid addressing the root causes of the challenges we see, like systemic racism and poverty, because we say those are beyond our control and aren't early childhood issues" - ECAP participant

Parents Continue to Experience Racism and Trauma When Accessing Early Childhood Services and The Early Childhood System Has Not Reckoned with Past and Present Harms

Many parts of our early childhood system have caused harm to young children and their families in ways that we are still working to fully understand. Acknowledging and addressing these harms is an important step toward being able to equitably serve young children and families moving forward.

Unfortunately, parents continue to experience racism when interacting with early childhood services in Durham. Black parents who responded to the Durham ECAP parent survey were more likely to report that their concerns were not taken seriously. For example, 15% of Black parents with household income less than \$50,000 and 17.7% of Black parents with household income more than \$50,000 reported that their concerns were not taken seriously during their experience with prenatal care in Durham. In contrast, 0% of white parents making less than \$50,000 and 0.82% of white parents making more than \$50,000 reported that their concerns were not taken seriously at prenatal appointments.

Parents report that they may avoid formal services to avoid feeling dehumanized, for fear of their children being taken away from them due to bias, or for fear of deportation due to their immigration status. These experiences create disparities in access because parents of color are having to weigh the potential of encountering discrimination as they are deciding when and how to access services.

"Distrust of the system" - ECAP participant

"Individuals recognizing how they have benefitted from oppressive systems" - ECAP participant

"We can't just layer principles of "equity" on top of unresolved past and present harms and oppression. In order to achieve equity ideals, we will have to move beyond simply access and inclusion (in often historically racist and exclusive systems/institutions) towards transformation and collective liberation... What does that look like in early childhood spaces?" - ECAP participant

"Not enough providers who are trauma-informed and understand the impacts of toxic stress" - ECAP participant

"Implicit bias" - ECAP participant

“The organizations need to be more consistent so the community trusts them and sees the help” - Durham parent

Opportunities

See Durham ECAP recommendations, which seek to leverage our strengths to address our challenges:

- 1. Address institutional racism as a root cause and share power with parents and communities.
- 8. Ensure families with young children have economic security and opportunities for wealth-building and long-term economic prosperity.
- 13. Promote preventive and responsive approaches to foster social-emotional, mental health, and resilience* of young children and their families.
- 14. Reimagine Social Services and Child Protective Services to become more trauma-informed, anti-racist, and focused on prevention.

THEME 2: CENTERING PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE AS EXPERTS

Primary takeaway: Too often the parents and communities who are closest to the challenges with our early childhood system are not the ones centered in decision-making about what should happen to address those challenges.

Strengths

Strong Community Engagement and Organizing in Durham

Durham benefits from well-organized, grassroots networks that have built capacity and power with communities with lived experience to advocate for the changes they know need to happen. We are also beginning to see changes in how local government values community engagement in efforts like Durham's [participatory budgeting](#) process and in the development of Durham's [comprehensive plan](#). Many ECAP participants identified Durham's history of activism and engaged community as strengths to build on.

Challenges

Communities Are Not Often Fully Valued in Planning, Decision-Making and Leadership

The ideas and opinions of parents are not fully valued in decision-making about how to address challenges in our early childhood system and how to direct resources. This cycle continues to seed distrust amongst communities who have participated in the past and then not seen a true willingness from organizations and institutions to act on their ideas and share power in decision-making and leadership. This would require a shift in our mental models around who is capable of making decisions and whose information and knowledge is valuable and should result in big shifts to our processes for planning and decision-making.

"Oftentimes we ask "how can we get the community to trust us?" Instead let's ask, "what do we need to do to BE TRUSTWORTHY?" - ECAP participant

"We often create opportunities for families to join, but create barriers to participation." - ECAP participant

"Continue to meet people where they are...go to the people. Lean on trusted community members to get this done." - ECAP participant

"Building trust, building relationships that aren't transactional, creating communities of care." - ECAP participant

"Include and involve those with lived experience at the beginning and give them decision making power. SHARE THE POWER." - ECAP participant

"We need to make sure that we do not assume that an org is most fit to lead just b/c of its stature. Or that a person has the greatest expertise just b/c they have a certain academic degree. There are currently overlooked people/orgs who are actually most fit to lead b/c of

their lived experience and connection to community. Remove the traditional checkboxes that create barriers to people being tapped for leadership and pay.” - ECAP participant
“We need to change the deficit model and change our positions to be part of the solution: [early childhood educators] are a powerful grassroots organization who shapes the foundation of the US. We need to come together as a powerful unit.” - ECAP focus group participant

THEME 3: SUPPORTING FAMILIES WITHIN CONTEXT OF CULTURES AND COMMUNITIES

Primary takeaway: Families want to receive support and care within the context of their culture and community in a way that promotes a sense of belonging.

Strengths

Community-Rooted People and Programs Partnering with Families to Build Culturally Affirming Communities of Care

Parents expressed gratitude for the ways in which communities have been supporting one another with social and material support (like diapers, food, and transportation) particularly during the pandemic. Community-rooted programs are often more culturally competent as they are delivering services in partnership with the community and in a culturally competent way. Parents and ECAP participants commented on the benefits of services that reflect the communities they serve.

“Parents and families supporting each other locally through swap meets” - Durham parent
“When we were busy, the community helped us take care of our children and taught us a lot of parenting knowledge.” - Durham parent
“In these pandemic times I have seen how the Durham community has been supporting many families, and that makes us as a family feel supported that we are not alone in this situation.” - Durham parent
“A lot of black and brown leadership and brilliance.” - Durham parent

Challenges

Undervalued Grassroots, Community Leaders and Community-Rooted Organizations⁶ and Lack of Resources to Support and Scale Their Work

⁶ As defined by [Communities in Partnership](#), “Formal and informal groups that are owned, run, and operated by the people that live and work within their own communities. These organizations are not only run by the most impacted within the community context but they are directly accountable to their neighbors and members. They can operate as a non-profit, for-profit, faith community or other organized formal or informal community group. The main identifier is that the board, staff, and mission and vision were created and owned by those living within

Despite the desire that parents have for culturally relevant, community-rooted programs, these services lack funding and other resources that would promote sustainability and an ability to scale to serve more people. They are historically undervalued and there is a sense that organizations who are not from the community come in thinking they “know best,” even though they may not share lived experience with the community or look like the community they serve. Many of these resources are not designated as evidence-based or evidence-informed practice because they are emerging and the organizations have not had the resources to or have chosen not to evaluate their work in traditional ways that are oftentimes rooted in white supremacy culture and the nonprofit industrial complex.⁷ This creates additional barriers to funding from larger, public or private funding sources that require those designations.

“Little to no support for BIPOC organizations doing work within their own community” - ECAP participant

“Move from “getting community input” on our pre-existing plans to acknowledging that communities already have priorities, plans and solutions that just haven't been invested in and so can't be implemented or scaled.” - ECAP participant

“Could do more to value help/suggestions from the community” - ECAP participant

“Cultural diversity: ensuring we can be culturally competent in services and meet needs in this space” - ECAP participant

“Understanding the cultural differences of the families we serve” - ECAP participant

“Not enough providers and decision makers that reflect the population served” - ECAP participant

“Programs catered for and led by people of color.” - Durham parent

Opportunities

See Durham ECAP recommendations, which seek to leverage our strengths to address our challenges:

- 1. Address institutional racism as a root cause and share power with parents and communities.
- 2. Ensure early childhood professionals across sectors are respected, well-compensated, highly trained, and reflect the communities they serve.
- 13. Promote preventive and responsive approaches to foster social-emotional, mental health, and resilience* of young children and their families.
- 15. Ensure birth through 3rd grade learning environments are trauma-informed, culturally affirming, gender affirming, and focused on social-emotional health.

the community they are focusing their work on or have been directly impacted by the area or context in which they serve.” (Source: Camryn Smith, edited by Niasha Frey, MPH)

⁷ See the Durham ECAP's "[Glossary](#)" for further discussion of these terms and concepts.

THEME 4: BUILDING AWARENESS ABOUT AND INVESTMENT IN SUPPORTS DURING EARLY CHILDHOOD

Primary takeaway: We must build on existing momentum and expertise to help everyone understand the value of attention to and investment in the early years.

The experiences a child has early in life sets the stage for the rest of their life. More than one million new neural connections form every second in the first few years.^{xviii} It is critical that our community ensures families who are raising children have the resources and the support they need, that parents and other caregivers understand the importance of creating warm, nurturing interactions and relationships with the children they care for, and that all young children are exposed to engaging and enriching experiences.

Durham has seen strong investments in recent years to support early childhood, but there is an opportunity to build more support for and awareness of the importance of the early years in our community.

Strengths

Big Investments in and Leadership Support for Early Childhood

Durham County Commissioners and leadership have been strong supporters of early childhood. They have invested in the planning and coordination to develop this Durham Early Childhood Action Plan. They have also heavily invested in establishing and scaling the county's universal Pre-K program, Durham PreK. In addition, new leadership positions were created to support community efforts around early childhood system change, as well as preventing adverse childhood experiences and promoting resilience.

In recent years, Durham has been the recipient of several federal investments in early childhood. For example, a recent federal grant invested \$4 million in Durham County to foster the healthy development and wellness of all young children in Durham County, preparing them to thrive in school and beyond. This project, called Responsive Early Access for Durham's Young Children (READY) is focused on the social-emotional and mental wellbeing of young children.

"Commitment to funding and capacity building" - ECAP participant

"History of consistent funding and support for the many resources in Durham" - ECAP participant

"Agreement on importance of early childhood development" - ECAP participant

Support for Early Childhood from Medical and Academic Systems

As a part of the Research Triangle, Durham has access to strong academic and research institutions with expertise in child health and development.

"Robust health systems with research focus" - ECAP participant
"University and college support - North Carolina Central University, Duke, Durham Tech Community College around education and health" - ECAP participant
"Major education institutions - broad approaches to problem solving" - ECAP participant
"Rooted in research around early childhood development" - ECAP participant

Challenges

Not Enough Public Understanding of How Children Develop and the Importance of Early Years

While understanding seems to be growing across the board about the critical importance of the early years and the role they play in setting a foundation for later development, there is room for building more awareness. It is often said that there is no manual for parenting, and most parents, no matter how well-resourced, how well-educated, or how well-parented themselves, will say that they were not prepared for the challenges that come with parenting. Parents lifted up the importance of getting early support in understanding child development. Early care and education educators, in particular, do not feel like families always understand the importance of early childhood education and of play for a child's development.

"I like the idea of parenting groups for all parents to connect with one another and also trained professionals. I feel like I have so much to learn about early childhood in particular, but am not always sure where to go for help. Maybe all parents feel this way." - Durham parent

"When parents walk into a classroom all they see is playing and toys. They don't think this makes a difference for kids or they feel they are not learning. As a teacher, I see how all the toys have a purpose and I can see how they develop the child, their language, their mind.... But as parents we all need more parent education to understand the value of the classroom and the value of playing." - Durham parent and early childhood educator

"Perhaps study groups for parents to help understand the behavior and changes that are occurring in children." - Durham parent

Opportunities

See Durham ECAP recommendations, which seek to leverage our strengths to address our challenges:

- 3. Increase resource awareness and create an easily navigable service system for families with young children.
- 6. Expand opportunities for accessible, inclusive, safe, and family-friendly enrichment activities and public spaces.

- 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

THEME 5: STRENGTHENING THE NETWORK OF SERVICES, PROGRAMS, AND RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO FAMILIES

Primary takeaway: Durham is rich in resources for families, but in order for all families to have access to these resources, we need to make the service system easier to understand and address barriers to access and usability.

Strengths

Many Services, Programs and Resources for Families

Parents and providers alike appreciate the wealth of resources and programs in Durham that are available for children and families. In general, parents mentioned home visiting for new parents, cultural heritage organizations, and service navigation programs. There are a number of universally available supports in Durham that are integral to our early childhood system, including universal PreK, universal home visiting, and a universal early childhood book distribution, for example. These universal supports are helping to ensure that families feel supported in the early years.

“There are several organizations whose goal is to provide equitable access to all” - Durham parent

“Many non profit organizations” - Durham parent

“There are a lot of programs in Durham in general” - Durham parent

“There are lots of programs to support a variety of things a new parent needs from help with breastfeeding, clothes, books, toys, diapers and groceries.” - Durham parent

“So far I have found a lot of help for my children, people who have helped me a lot, to not stress so much. I know them, they understand me, and I don't feel despair.” - Durham parent

Challenges

The Early Childhood System of Supports and Services is Difficult to Navigate

Parents shared that they want clear, centralized information to know what early childhood services and basic needs supports are available for their family. Awareness and service navigation issues hinder many parents from receiving services like early intervention, child care, housing, food, healthcare, and economic support.

Respondents to the Durham ECAP survey were asked how likely they would be to participate in programs that provide individual and/or group support to help navigate all the available resources to families in Durham at no cost. **53.3%** of parents said they would be likely or extremely likely to participate.

"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
"Confusing systems. It's difficult for those outside of the profession to understand or navigate the system, even with support." - ECAP participant
"Communication about events, deadlines, services, etc., across providers and to families" - ECAP participant
"Lack of peer support/navigators" - Durham parent
"Fewer obstacles when requesting help, more information on the programs in the clinics and more bilingual people." - Durham parent

When information is provided, parents report that it is hard to understand and overly complicated.

"Use common language to discuss programs with community, avoid academic terms. How we use language is important." - Durham parent
"Create a user friendly system to help families not feel threatened or not understanding, help us to feel comfortable to navigate" - Durham parent

There Are Major Barriers to Accessing Early Childhood Services in Durham

The most common barriers to accessing services include fear of judgement and discrimination based on prior experiences with cultural insensitivity, language, transportation, eligibility, and timing for working families.

Fear of Judgement and Discrimination Based on Prior Experiences with Cultural Insensitivity and Poor Customer Experience

Parents expressed that even if they are presented with challenges and know of resources and supports available, they are hesitant to access these because of their experiences or their community's prior negative experiences accessing these services. There are many early childhood systems in Durham that are intended to serve parents, but some parents are experiencing harm and trauma through their interactions with frontline staff and leadership.

"They don't listen to us. When we ask questions they say things like, 'these are not my guidelines', 'I just work here.'" - Durham parent/caregiver
"The staff were rude when I went to the food bank and I won't go back." - Durham parent/caregiver
"Not just access, but easy and non-stigmatized access to meals/food" - ECAP participant

"Maintenance is an issue with Durham Housing Authority. Our toilet backed up at the same time and there was feces in the tub. I had to advocate for myself or it would've been that way for a week. Maintenance said, 'Be thankful your sink works.'" - Durham parent
"A social services department that doesn't hate human life." - Durham parent
"Stop paying social workers to yell at people and just pay people. It's that simple." - Durham parent

Language Barriers:

The most common non-English language spoken in Durham is Spanish. 11% of the overall population of Durham, NC are native Spanish speakers.^{xix}

However, there are many other languages spoken in Durham. DPS currently has around 600 students enrolled whose home language is a language other than English or Spanish. (DPS) Durham has around 150 refugee youth between the ages of 0-8. (World Relief via State Office's Refugee Information System). The most frequently spoken languages among our refugee communities in Durham include Arabic, Dari/Farsi, French, Spanish, Swahili, Tigrinya, and Urdu.

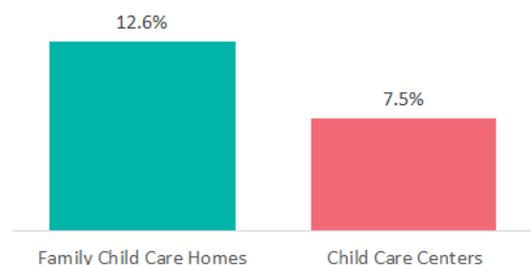
Parents who speak languages other than English shared their challenges finding support and services for their children. They also spoke in nuanced ways about the differences between having information in their native language, which helps support access, and actively being welcomed and affirmed, which supports belonging.

"The interpreter they provided was really a service navigator who only spoke English and didn't ensure I had support at all steps when it was all so foreign to me" - Durham parent
"Strengthen relationships between ELL families and DPS. Need bilingual staff at multiple levels at every school, we are missing opportunities to engage and support non-English speaking families" - ECAP participant

Transportation Barriers:

A lack of reliable transportation was consistently identified as a barrier to accessing community resources, child care, and work. Recent data reveal that 16.1% of Durham BIPOC households do not own a vehicle and only 28% of residents are "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the ease of travel by bus.^{xx}

Figure 4: Early Care and Education Programs Offering Transportation to and from Home



Many families expressed challenges with transportation to Family Child Care Homes and centers. Only 12.6% of Family Child Care Homes in Durham offer transportation and only 7.5% of centers offer transportation.

Families also would like better sidewalks so that they can safely travel by foot (and stroller) with their children.

Research suggests that cities prioritize “15-minute (or less) neighborhoods for babies” as an important strategy to shorten distances to key

early childhood services and support healthy development for our youngest residents.^{xxii}

"The afterschool programs and activities that are available are never at times compatible with my work schedule. I can't take them there." – Durham parent/caregiver

"In our hispanic culture, in our home countries, it is our families who help us raising our children. When my kids were little I paid a friend to take care of them. I had to wait for a lottery pick to be assigned (for E/HS). When I did (finally hear about being placed in a center), I had to choose between continuing to work and my child's education because of my job. There was no transportation available (to or from the center/provided by the center). I decided to accept the spot and take my child to school." – Durham parent/caregiver

"Now my only concern is that if you don't have a vehicle none of the previous mentioned attractions are easily accessible. (Parks, museum of life in science, YMCA etc)" – Durham parent/caregiver

"Babies are not safe on the bus + have to have a car seat in an Uber of Lyft => could one be integrated into buses?" – Transit Plan Community Listening Session

"The neighborhood I live in is dangerous and there is a section with no sidewalk or grass, so I have to run in the street pushing my daughter in a stroller to get to the bus stop." – Durham parent/caregiver participating in the Durham Transit Equity Campaign

Eligibility Barriers:

Families are frustrated by the eligibility criteria that prevent them from accessing needed assistance. These include income cut-offs that create “benefit cliffs,” citizenship and documentation requirements, and family structure. There were a number of comments about gaps in services for families that do not qualify for various forms of subsidy and public assistance, but who cannot pay the market rate cost for services or supports like housing, child care, summer camp, and enrichment activities. Parents and providers also expressed frustration that parent education services tend to only be targeted at families with low incomes, despite

the knowledge that all parents can benefit from additional support, and being poor does not make someone a bad parent.

"Having access to support. We are all trying to get ahead for our children. We are working hard. We should not be denied services just because we started earning a little bit more." - ECAP participant

"That there are more aid programs or that they are a little more accessible"

"More resources for families of young children that do not qualify for public/government assistance." - ECAP participant

"Gaps in eligibility for healthcare" - ECAP participant

"Limitations based on immigration status" - ECAP participant

"Prevent creating barriers that will breakdown the family unit (ex. The number of adults in a household, should not determine the type of need/support)" - Durham parent

"The system made it difficult for Black fathers to be able to support due to certain criteria"

"It's not just poverty. We have to address middle income. Even in what we're doing [child care], we need to be inclusive otherwise we will always be at the deficit side of the conversation."

Difficult Timing for Working Families:

Parents also shared that the timing of parent support services, in particular, and enrichment activities for children make it challenging to participate.

"Opportunities outside of work hours for working parents" - Durham parent

"More opportunities for working mothers. Most things I have found are usually in the middle of the week when I am at work." - Durham parent

Opportunities

See Durham ECAP recommendations, which seek to leverage our strengths to address our challenges:

- 3. Increase resource awareness and create an easily navigable service system for families with young children.
- 4. Facilitate data sharing between agencies and with communities to better understand areas of greatest need, track progress, and promote transparency, accountability, and systems building.
- 5. Ensure early childhood services are accessible and welcoming to families regardless of immigration status or English language proficiency.
- 7. Advocate for workplaces that understand and support the needs of families with young children.
- 12. Provide reliable and free or low-cost transportation to early childhood services.

THEME 6: COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION WITHIN DURHAM'S EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM

Primary takeaway: Durham has a strong history of collaboration and there is an opportunity to reduce duplication, improve communication and data sharing.

Strengths

Cross-Sector Collaboration and Public-Private Partnerships

There are many cross-sector collaborations happening in Durham that focus on different parts of our early childhood system. These collaborations range from focusing on specific programs (e.g. implementing Durham PreK), to creating a shared agenda around a topic area (e.g. Durham ACEs and Resilience Taskforce), to shared community updates for awareness (e.g. Community Advisory Board).

"A spirit of collaboration in Durham" - ECAP participant
"Desire to communicate across organizations with shared goals" - ECAP participant
"Cross-sector partnerships and groups" - ECAP participant
"Motivation across the system to work together towards common goal" - ECAP participant
"Shared vision around breaking down barriers to access so all Durham families can engage in early childhood services." -ECAP participant

Dedication and Infrastructure to Improving Care Coordination

There are several efforts underway to improve care coordination. NCCARE360 provides infrastructure for cross-agency referral, while initiatives like North Carolina Integrated Care for Kids and organizations like Care Management for At-Risk Children (CMARC) support coordinated care management.

Challenges

Lack of Effective Collaboration and Duplication of Efforts

The downside of having so many collaborative efforts across Durham is that there is overlap and duplication across efforts. These cross-agency taskforces, committees, and workgroups require valuable staff time.

"Repetitive pulls on everyone's resources by pulling together committees or taskforce - how do we better communicate" - ECAP participant
"Multiple efforts to bring everyone into one system (System of Care, Durham Family Initiative, NCCARE360) struggle" - ECAP participant

Working in Silos by Sector, Age Group, Area of Early Childhood, Etc.

Early childhood system leaders and providers shared that a system-level challenge we face is working within our separate “lanes” - either by population (a specific neighborhood, race/ethnicity, etc.), age group (e.g. 0-3, school-age, etc.), issue area (e.g. health, family support, early care and education, etc.), or sector (grassroots organizations, larger nonprofits, academic institutions, healthcare organizations, government agencies, funders, parent groups, etc.). As a result, providers and systems leaders identified a concern that we are working on the same challenges and could be much more effective if we pooled resources and redistributed equitably. There are also multiple programs who can be serving the same families, but often lack the infrastructure and communication channels to adequately share information and referrals with one another to better meet the needs of families.

As a result, parents shared that they sometimes receive information from so many different places that the system feels very disjointed and challenging to navigate. There are also multiple asks for their input and feedback on the same types of issues, programs, etc.

Disparate Data Systems and Inadequate Data Sharing

Agencies express a need to be able to share data in order to better understand outcomes, areas of need, and to align resources and services to better support families. When families receive various supports but there is not data or information available about the supports they are receiving, care may be uniformed, duplicative, or providing the family with competing information. Families also report frustration at having to constantly share their story everywhere they go, which can be exhausting and retraumatizing. Finally, we are better able to direct resources when we have data to understand the impact that different combinations of supports for young children and their families. Data sharing across our early childhood system could help solve some of these issues.

At the same time, there are also a number of concerns about data and data-sharing. One concern relates to assessments that are meant to inform care or teaching of an individual child (formative assessments) being used as summative assessments, to report on aggregate performance of a group of children. This is especially problematic when there is not uniform training or implementation of assessments, and when those assessments are not well-normed or were only tested on a population that is different from the population being measured. Another data usage concern relates to how specific data may be used for broader purposes (for example, using one indicator related to pre-literacy skills to report on overall kindergarten readiness). Another concern relates to whether data sharing can put families at risk (of deportation, over-identification of BIPOC families by child protective services, usage of algorithms to predict later outcomes like criminal justice involvement, etc.).

Turfism and Gate Keeping

Agencies in Durham are often finding themselves in competition with one another for funding and leadership, reinforcing duplication of efforts and discouraging collaboration. Agencies have identified that the resultant turfism and lack of collaboration is ultimately the most harmful to families.

Opportunities

See Durham ECAP recommendations, which seek to leverage our strengths to address our challenges:

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- 4. Facilitate data sharing between agencies and with communities to better understand areas of greatest need, track progress, and promote transparency, accountability, and systems building.

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