

# North Carolina Early Childhood Advisory Council

## Strategic Report

*“When we invest wisely in children and families, the next generation will pay that back through a lifetime of productivity and responsible citizenship.”* National Scientific Council on the Developing Child<sup>1</sup>

Governor Bev Perdue is creating North Carolina’s Early Childhood Advisory Council as an investment in our future. Research has demonstrated that the early years are critical to ensuring success in both school and life. Many aspects of brain architecture are established before age 6 when children enter school, and we know that this brain architecture is shaped by children’s early experiences.<sup>2</sup> Further, “scientific consensus is emerging that the origins of adult disease are often found among developmental and biological disruptions occurring during the early years of life.”<sup>3</sup> What happens in the first five years of life matters for decades to come.

The Governor’s vision is that all of North Carolina’s young children birth to 5 are healthy and learning to their full potential—developing their readiness for success in school, citizenship, and life. In fact, Governor Perdue has stated that early childhood is the “Ready” of her *Career and College—Ready, Set, Go!* education agenda. The Governor has called upon the North Carolina Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) to lead our state to create and sustain a shared vision for young children and a comprehensive, integrated system of high quality early care and education, family strengthening, and health services that support ready children, families, and communities. North Carolina is a national leader in early childhood. The federal funding available through the ECAC provides an opportunity to expand our success and accomplish even more for our state’s young children.

North Carolina’s Early Childhood Advisory Council will begin its work addressing **5 major goals.**

1. **Develop an integrated, comprehensive 3-year strategic plan** for high-quality health, family strengthening, and early care and education services that support ready children, families, and communities.
2. **Strengthen the quality of programs** and expand opportunities for young children and their families to participate in high-quality programs.

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<sup>1</sup> National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. (2007). *The science of early childhood development: Closing the gap between what we know and what we do.* <http://www.developingchild.net>

<sup>2</sup> National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. (2007). *The timing and quality of early experiences combine to shape brain architecture: Working paper #5.* <http://www.developingchild.net>

<sup>3</sup> Shonkoff, J. P., Boyce, W. T., & McEwen, B. S. (2009). Neuroscience, molecular biology, and the childhood roots of health disparities: Building a new framework for health promotion and disease prevention, *Journal of American Medical Association*, 301, pp. 2252-2259. doi: 10.1001/jama.2009.754

3. **Strengthen awareness and commitment** among families, business, and policy makers to ensure that all young children in North Carolina are healthy, learning, and thriving.
4. **Strengthen coordination and collaboration** across service sectors to promote high-quality, efficient services for young children and their families.
5. **Support the implementation of an integrated data system** that meets the individual and collective needs and capacities of state-funded programs serving young children birth to age five.

## North Carolina as a National Leader

North Carolina has long been a national leader in its commitment to young children and its innovative efforts to build a system of services that best meets the needs of young children. Among these exemplary efforts are:

- *Smart Start*. Created in 1993, Smart Start is a pioneering public-private partnership designed to ensure that every child reaches his or her potential and is prepared for success in a global community. Every state in the nation has requested assistance and resources from the Smart Start National Technical Assistance Center, created in 2001. Smart Start has become a national model for how to support local community-based partnerships to work together to best meet the needs of young children and their families.
- *Star Rated License*. North Carolina was the first state to develop a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) for child care programs—and is still one of only two states that have integrated a QRIS into its state child care licensing system.
- *The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood<sup>®</sup> Project*. Twenty years ago, Child Care Services Association launched in NC the Teacher Education And Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H.) Early Childhood<sup>®</sup> Project to address the issues of under-education, poor compensation and high turnover within the early childhood workforce. The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood<sup>®</sup> Project gives scholarships to child care staff to complete coursework in early childhood education and to increase their compensation. The program is now implemented in 21 states.
- *More at Four*. In 2001, North Carolina established More at Four, a state-funded pre-kindergarten program designed to serve four-year-old children at risk of later school difficulties. More at Four is ranked as one of the top 10 pre-k programs in the country and for several years has been one of only two state programs that have met all of the quality standards benchmarks.<sup>4</sup>
- *ABCD Initiative*. Through the Assuring Better Child Development (ABCD) initiative, North Carolina is a national leader in the use of appropriate general developmental and behavioral screenings and surveillance in primary care settings. Most well-child visits for young children (under age 5) conducted by primary care practices include use of a formal validated developmental screening tool.

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<sup>4</sup> Barnett, W. S., Epstein, D. J., Friedman, A. H., Sansanelli, R. A., & Hustedt, J. T. (2009). *The state of preschool 2009: State preschool yearbook*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

The federal funding through the ECAC provides an opportunity to build on North Carolina's success to enable us to better serve young children and their families. North Carolina's investments in young children have made a tremendous impact—and yet there is still work to be done. For instance, nearly 15% of African American babies born in NC in 2008 weighed less than 2500 grams.<sup>5</sup> A little more than 30% of children birth to 5 in NC do not have a medical home.<sup>6</sup> In 2008, only 46% of infants and toddlers served in licensed programs across the state were enrolled in high quality 4- or 5-star licensed child care centers or homes—with great variation across the state (regional percentages ranged from 13% to 66%).<sup>7</sup>

North Carolina must continue to invest in its youngest citizens by bringing together leaders across service sectors to develop a strong, comprehensive, integrated system of state services for young children and their families. The Early Childhood Advisory Council will serve an important leadership role in supporting the next steps in North Carolina's ongoing system-building efforts.

## **ECAC Membership, Responsibilities, and Structure**

North Carolina is establishing its Early Childhood Advisory Council. This report describes the current membership, responsibilities, and initial structure for the ECAC. Over the coming year, other members are expected to be added, and the structure may evolve.

**Membership.** The NC ECAC will be comprised of gubernatorial appointees who serve on a voluntary, unpaid basis. ECAC members will represent a broad range of constituencies including early childhood care and education, early intervention, higher education, state government agencies, private nonprofit organizations, health care providers, business, parents, local community leaders, and private philanthropic organizations.

**Responsibilities.** The following ECAC responsibilities have been delineated by the Governor:

- a. Strengthen coordination and collaboration among the various sectors and settings of early childhood programs in the State, including health, family support, and early care and education.
- b. Create and sustain a shared vision for young children in North Carolina and adopt system-wide outcomes for young children.
- c. Develop a statewide strategic plan that delineates major goals and actions for reaching the desired system-wide outcomes for young children.
- d. Identify key infrastructure needs or enhancements and recommend policies to promote and sustain a comprehensive, integrated system of high-quality, health, family support, and early care and education services that supports ready children, families, and communities.

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<sup>5</sup> State Center for Health Statistics NC Department of Health and Human Services. <http://www.schs.state.nc.us/SCHS/births/matched/2008/all.html>

<sup>6</sup> Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative. (2007). *National Survey of Children's Health*. Data Resource Center for Child and Adolescent health website. <http://www.nschdata.org>

<sup>7</sup> Child Care Services Association. (2008). *Who's caring for our babies now? Executive summary*. <http://www.childcareservices.org>

- e. Identify funding priorities and recommend to the Governor a budget for a high-quality, comprehensive, integrated system of state services to young children and their families.
- f. Conduct periodic statewide needs assessments on the quality and availability of programs and services for children from birth to school entry.
- g. Recommend enhancements in state early learning standards and undertake efforts to maintain high-quality comprehensive early learning standards, as needed.
- h. Recommend strategies to improve the quality of health, family support, and early care and education services for young children and their families and to increase overall participation of children in existing state and federal programs.
- i. Identify opportunities for and barriers to coordination and collaboration among existing programs for young children.
- j. Recommend strategies to create an effective, comprehensive, integrated professional development system and career advancement plans for the workforce serving young children and their families.
- k. Assess the capacity and effectiveness of two- and four-year public and private institutions of higher education in the state toward supporting the development of early childhood educators and other staff serving young children and their families.
- l. Support the development and implementation of a statewide, unified, longitudinal data collection system for young children.
- m. Develop and implement plans to increase awareness and commitment among parents, professionals, business, policy makers, and the public at large to ensuring that all young children in North Carolina are healthy, learning, and thriving.
- n. Submit to the Governor a statewide strategic report addressing the activities of the Advisory Council, and provide a copy of the strategic report to the State Director of Head Start Collaboration. After submission of the strategic report, the Advisory Council shall meet periodically to review any implementation of the recommendations in such report and any changes in state and local needs.
- o. Monitor progress toward goals and present an annual written report of progress to date.
- p. Coordinate and oversee relevant federal grants and grant programs to maximize the effectiveness of resources in working toward the state's goals for the early childhood system and outcomes for young children.
- q. Seek, identify and advocate for resources, including submitting grant proposals, for funding to implement the state's early childhood initiatives. To the extent funds are available, the Advisory Council is specifically authorized to make grants to other entities, to contract with other entities and to utilize funds for the operation of the Advisory Council.

**Structure.** The ECAC is scheduled to meet at least twice a year. The Early Childhood Systems Resource Committee is the first committee to be created and includes representatives of major state agencies responsible for serving young children and their families. This committee will identify possible strategies for strengthening the efficiency and effectiveness of services for young children and their families. Additional committees will be established, as needed, and may

include individuals who are not part of the ECAC. The ECAC may also work with existing workgroups or committees to support the development of a comprehensive system of services for young children and their families. The structure of the ECAC will be further delineated in the coming year.

## **Needs Assessment**

Federal guidelines require the ECAC to conduct a periodic needs assessment on which to guide the state's efforts to support the health and development of young children birth to five and their families. In the coming year, the ECAC will thoroughly review data about children, families, and services as part of developing a strategic plan. ECAC members will also review past needs assessments and formulate plans for coordinating and/or expanding needs assessments related to services for young children and their families. For instance, Smart Start legislation requires a needs and resources assessment every three years to help guide local partnership program planning and statewide resource allocation decisions. The last needs and resources assessment was completed in 2003 and focused on children's demographics, early childhood programs, and the early childhood workforce. In developing NC's ECAC application, various reports and sources of existing data were utilized. Additionally, summary information from a series of public forums conducted by the North Carolina Partnership for Children was used.

## **Approach**

The ECAC will focus its first year of work on the first goal—to develop a comprehensive 3-year strategic plan. Years 2 and 3 will focus on activities related to Goals 2-5 and respond to priorities identified through the strategic planning process. Proposed activities for each goal are described below. **It is important to note that activities may change based on the strategic planning process.**

<b>Goal 1. Develop an integrated, comprehensive 3-year strategic plan.</b>													
<b>Activities</b>	<b>Projected Timeline</b>												
	<b>Year 1</b>				<b>Year 2</b>				<b>Year 3</b>				
	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	
<b>Formalize the structure and operation of the ECAC.</b>													
Develop a formal structure for meetings and committee work, coordinate with existing groups, and develop shared knowledge among ECAC members.	X	X	X	X									
Identify all relevant organizations, councils, and committees and meet (in person or via conference call) to discuss coordination.	X	X											
Develop an ECAC handbook that delineates the structure and operation of the ECAC and its relationship to existing groups.				X									
<b>Conduct a needs assessment.</b>													
Summarize information from existing, recent data about statewide needs of children and families.	X	X											
Summarize information from existing, recent data about the coordination and integration of early care and education, health, and family strengthening systems.	X	X											
Complete various policy scans (e.g., CLASP Tool to Examine state Child Care Subsidy Policies and Promote Stable, Quality Care for Low-Income Babies and Toddlers; Zero to Three's Self-Assessment for states).	X	X	X										
Convene a policy forum.				X									

Goal 1 continued...	Projected Timeline											
Activities	Year 1				Year 2				Year 3			
	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4
Write a report that summarizes findings from the multiple needs assessment activities.				X	X							
Develop a plan for conducting a statewide early childhood needs assessment.												X
<b>Develop a comprehensive strategic plan.</b>												
Develop a process for creating a statewide strategic planning.	X											
Review existing indicators and outcomes.	X											
Determine a small set of systems-level child and family outcomes.		X										
Develop a draft 3-year strategic plan.			X									
Obtain public feedback on the strategic plan through public forums and web-based surveys.			X	X								
Finalize the strategic plan.				X								

<b>Goal 2. Strengthen the quality of programs and expand opportunities.</b>												
<b>Activities</b>	<b>Projected Timeline</b>											
	<b>Year 1</b>				<b>Year 2</b>				<b>Year 3</b>			
	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4
	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4
<b>Identify and pilot developmental screening &amp; referral systems.</b>												
Review current screening and referral practices, identifying barriers and opportunities.	X	X										
Select strategies to support screening and referral.			X									
Issue an RFP to solicit applications from organizations interested in implementing these strategies.			X									
Select organization and establish contract to conduct the work.				X								
Screening and referral strategies will be implemented in pilot counties.					X	X	X	X				
Appropriate next steps will be identified.								X				
Screening and referral strategies will continue to be implemented.									X	X	X	X
Next steps identified in Year 2 will be implemented.									X	X	X	X
<b>Make policy and budget recommendations to the Governor and policymakers.</b>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Other objectives and activities to be determined.</b>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

<b>Goal 3. Strengthen Awareness and Commitment.</b>													
<b>Activities</b>	<b>Projected Timeline</b>												
	<b>Year 1</b>				<b>Year 2</b>				<b>Year 3</b>				
	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	
<b>Develop a communications plan.</b>													
Identify strategic communications partners.	X	X											
Hire a consultant to provide assistance in developing a communications plan.		X											
Draft a 2-year ECAC communications plan.		X	X										
Obtain feedback on the communications plan.			X										
Finalize the communications plan and identify priority activities.				X									
<b>Other objectives and activities to be determined.</b>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

<b>Goal 4. Strengthen coordination and collaboration.</b>												
<b>Activities</b>	<b>Projected Timeline</b>											
	<b>Year 1</b>				<b>Year 2</b>				<b>Year 3</b>			
	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4
<b>Provide incentives for community colleges to become nationally accredited.</b>												
Develop a recruitment strategy to identify and select 20 community colleges to become nationally accredited.	X	X										
Select the 20 participating community colleges			X	X	X	X						
Award grants to the participating community colleges.			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Strengthen coordination and improve the efficiency of services for young children and their families.</b>												
The Early Childhood Systems Resource Committee will identify possible ways for state agencies to serve children and families more efficiently.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
The Early Childhood Systems Resource Committee will identify key issues for the ECAC regarding system coordination and collaboration.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
The Early Childhood Systems Resource Committee will help implement ECAC recommendations regarding coordination and collaboration.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Make policy and budget recommendations to the Governor and policymakers.</b>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Other objectives and activities to be determined.</b>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

<b>Goal 5. Support the creation and implementation of an integrated data system.</b>												
<b>Objectives (in bold) &amp; Activities</b>	<b>Projected Timeline</b>											
	<b>Year 1</b>				<b>Year 2</b>				<b>Year 3</b>			
	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4
<b>Identify and coordinate existing data integration efforts.</b>												
Identify and contact individuals, organizations, and groups addressing data integration for state-funded services for children B-5 and their families across all service sectors.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Develop and implement a plan to coordinate existing efforts.			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Develop the data systems portion of the strategic plan that supports the larger early childhood goals and priorities.</b>												
Articulate data needs related to the goals and outcomes delineated by the ECAC.			X	X	X							
Develop a set of objectives, activities, and responsibilities related to data systems as part of the larger strategic plan.			X	X	X	X						
<b>Make policy and budget recommendations to the Governor and policymakers.</b>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Other objectives and activities to be determined.</b>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

In closing, Governor Bev Perdue intends for the North Carolina Early Childhood Advisory Council to add value to our existing early childhood efforts by bringing together a diverse group of people both within and outside of state government to move us into the next frontier of state-level systems building. There is still much to do to ensure that each young child in NC is healthy and learning to his or her full potential. The ECAC must work to continue to strengthen public commitment and maximize all resources to ensure the best possible outcomes for North Carolina's youngest citizens.