



The Early Childhood System

Presentation to the Governor's Commission on Access to Sound Basic Education

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Take Aways

- B-5 experiences are the foundation for later school & life success
- There isn't a single “system” for B-5
- No “magic bullet”
- All areas of children's development are important and inter-related
- Young children and families should have *access* to an *array of high-quality* services that meets their needs
- 3 major areas of services—health, family support, early care and education

Overview

- Where are young children before they go to school?
- What's important to know about children's development?
- What is NC's definition of school readiness?
- Research-based policy ideas
 - health
 - family support
 - learning

Where are
children before
they come to
school?



Who's Caring for Young Children in U.S.?

- National Survey of Early Care and Education (ECE)
- Household survey of parents of young children
- ECE provider survey
- Provides national estimates
- Data collected in 2012

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/national-survey-of-early-care-and-education-nsece-2010-2014>

Definition of ECE Providers

- Individual, no prior relationship, paid
- Individual, prior relationship, paid
- Individual, unpaid
- Center-based early care and education
 - includes Head Start and public pre-K
- Other organizational early care and education

National Survey of Early Care and Education Project Team. (2016). *Early Care and Education Usage and Households' Out-of-pocket Costs: Tabulations from the National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE)*. OPRE Report #2016-09, Washington DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/national-survey-of-early-care-and-education-nsece-2010-2014>

Who's Caring for Young Children in U.S.?

| Age | % with at least 1 regular ECE provider | % of those in center-based care |
|-----------------|--|---------------------------------|
| Infants | 44% | 9% |
| One-year-olds | 52% | 13% |
| Two-year-olds | 56% | 20% |
| Three-year-olds | 61% | 33% |
| Four-year-olds | 73% | 55% |

National Survey of Early Care and Education Project Team. (2016). *Early Care and Education Usage and Households' Out-of-pocket Costs: Tabulations from the National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE)*. OPRE Report #2016-09, Washington DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/national-survey-of-early-care-and-education-nsece-2010-2014>

NC Young Children

- Roughly 604,000 NC children birth thru age 4 in 2014

<http://www.ncchild.org/what-we-do/data/kids-count-data-center/>

- Some cared for by parents, relatives, friends and neighbors, other individuals
- Some cared for in regulated or licensed settings—licensed family child care, community-based child care centers, Head Start, NC Pre-K

Development is

- a dynamic, interactive process
- occurs in the context of relationships, experiences and environments
- created over time through interactions with the world and other people
- cumulative

Early Childhood Development

- The foundation of brain architecture develops early in life
 - Early brain development supports later, more complex thinking
- Interactions between genes and experiences shapes the brain
- Children develop in the context of families and other adults
- Toxic stress can impair development
- Easier to support healthy development early on than to fix problems later

NC's School Readiness Definition

- The **condition of children** when they enter school and the **capacity of schools** to meet the needs of children entering kindergarten
- Supported by families and communities
- Children are “ready” for school when they are age eligible for kindergarten

Areas of Children's Development

- Emotional-social development
- Health and physical development
- Language development and communication
- Approaches to learning
- Cognition and general knowledge

A Birth-3rd Grade Framework helps us...

- Develop a continuum of services and supports for children along the age span from birth to eight
 - No “magic bullet” program
 - No “magical age” for services
- Recognize the importance of health *and* family support *and* early education
- Focus more on the children, rather than the system(s)

B-5 vs. K-12



The Research Base for a Birth through Age Eight State Policy Framework

<https://earlysuccess.org/our-work/policy-framework>

Tout, K., Halle, T., Daily, S., Albertson-Junkans, L., & Moodie, S. (2013). *The research base for a birth through age eight state policy framework*. Washington, DC: Alliance for Early Success and Child Trends.



Policy Areas from the Birth-Eight Framework





- Poor pregnancy outcomes increases risk for poor health in early childhood
- Young children in poor health are at higher risk for adulthood obesity and cardiovascular disease
- Chronic health conditions (both mental and physical) have serious consequences in the short-term (e.g., missing school) and long-term (e.g., economic well-being)



- Health risks experienced early in life do not necessarily lead to poor health in adulthood, unless there are *consistent and cumulative experiences* that contribute to such a trajectory

A Sample of Health Policy Choices



- Timely and ongoing prenatal, pediatric health care
- Access to affordable health insurance for children and families
- Community-based programs targeting sources of toxic stress such as violence, crime, substance abuse, and mental illness, combined with supports for parents and caregivers who need them

Family Support



- Families support children's development, starting with:
 - adequate prenatal care
 - ensuring young children receive adequate food, shelter, and medical attention
 - living in safe and stimulating environments
- Lack of warm, positive relationships with parents/caregivers increases risk of later substance abuse, anti-social behavior, and juvenile crime

A Sample of Family Support Policy Choices



- Voluntary, evidence-based home visiting programs for new and expectant families at risk for poor child outcomes
- Prevention programs and services for children at risk of abuse and neglect and their families
- Access to child care assistance for eligible families with provisions for quality and continuity of care

Learning



- Birth through age eight is a critical span for:
 - physical health and motor development
 - cognitive development
 - language development
 - social-emotional development
 - motivational and regulatory skills
- Gaps in skill development between advantaged and disadvantaged children emerge early and predict developmental trajectories

Learning



- Access to high-quality care and learning programs for infants and toddlers with educational, health, and development components; high-quality child care; voluntary, full-day preschool for all low-income 3- and 4-year-olds; and full-day kindergarten
- Transition planning from early care, to preschool, to K-12 learning environments
- Access to effective professional development: pre-service education, training, and onsite support for applying knowledge to practice

Pre-Kindergarten

- All but 7 states offer Pre-K as of 2017
- NC has offered Pre-K since 2001
- In 2017, NC served about 27,000 4-year-olds
 - ~22% of all 4-year-olds

NC's Pre-K meets 9 of 10 quality standards

| | |
|--|--|
| Early learning & development standards | Class size |
| Teacher degree | Staff-child ratio |
| Teacher specialized training | Screening & referral |
| Assistant teacher degree | Meals |
| Staff professional development | Monitoring / continuous quality improvement system |

NC Pre-K Evaluations

- Multiple evaluations have been conducted by UNC-CH team

<http://fpg.unc.edu/projects/evaluation-nc-pre-kindergarten-program>

2015-16 evaluation highlights

- NC Pre-K children had greater math and executive functioning skills at the end of K compared to matched group who did not attend pre-K

<http://fpg.unc.edu/resources/effects-participation-north-carolina-pre-kindergarten-program-end-kindergarten-2015-2016-0>

Transitions

- Why important?
 - Transition activities associated with
 - Less stress
 - More social competence at beginning of K
 - Greater academic growth
 - Particularly helpful for children from low-income families

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/transitions/article/transition-kindergarten>

Successful Transitions from Preschool to Kindergarten

- Positive relationships among children, teachers, families
- Standards, assessments, and curricula that align
- Joint planning about the transition
- Joint professional development across preschool and K
- Information shared with families and the community

Zero to Three's Suggested Services for Infants and Toddlers



HEALTH

- Insurance coverage
- Prenatal care
- Developmental screening
- Medical home, with ongoing care



FAMILY SUPPORT

- Home visiting
- Work and family policies
- Special supports for families experiencing trauma



EARLY LEARNING

- Quality child care programs
- Early Head Start
- Early intervention

Zero to Three. (2012). *Putting the pieces together for infants and toddlers: Comprehensive, coordinated services.*

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/1000-putting-the-pieces-together-for-infants-and-toddlers-comprehensive-coordinated-systems>

System

- Families can rely on a coherent system of supports
- Families can access needed services
- Programs are integrated, coordinated, and well-funded
- A comprehensive array of services is available

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Cross-Cutting Policies



- Foster healthy environments
 - Libraries, parks, etc.
- Focus on prevention
 - Screening and referral; voluntary, universal home visiting
- Promote accountability and continuous improvement
 - Benchmark indicators, integrated data system, staff training

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Thank you!

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