




North Carolina Early Childhood Action Plan

“Real isn’t how you
are made,
It’s a thing that
happens to you.”

-Velveteen Rabbit



Why Now?

A group of diverse young children, including a Black boy, a white girl, a Hispanic girl, and a white boy, are smiling and laughing joyfully. They are outdoors, with green foliage in the background. The children are of various ethnicities and are dressed in casual clothing.

To keep our country strong and safe, we need to ensure all young Americans get the right start in life – we need more investments in high quality early education.”

- Henry “Hugh” Shelton General, US Army (Ret.) Former Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff

Our children are the rock on which our future will be built, our greatest asset as a nation. They will be the leaders of our country, the creators of our national wealth who care for and protect our people.

- Nelson Mandela

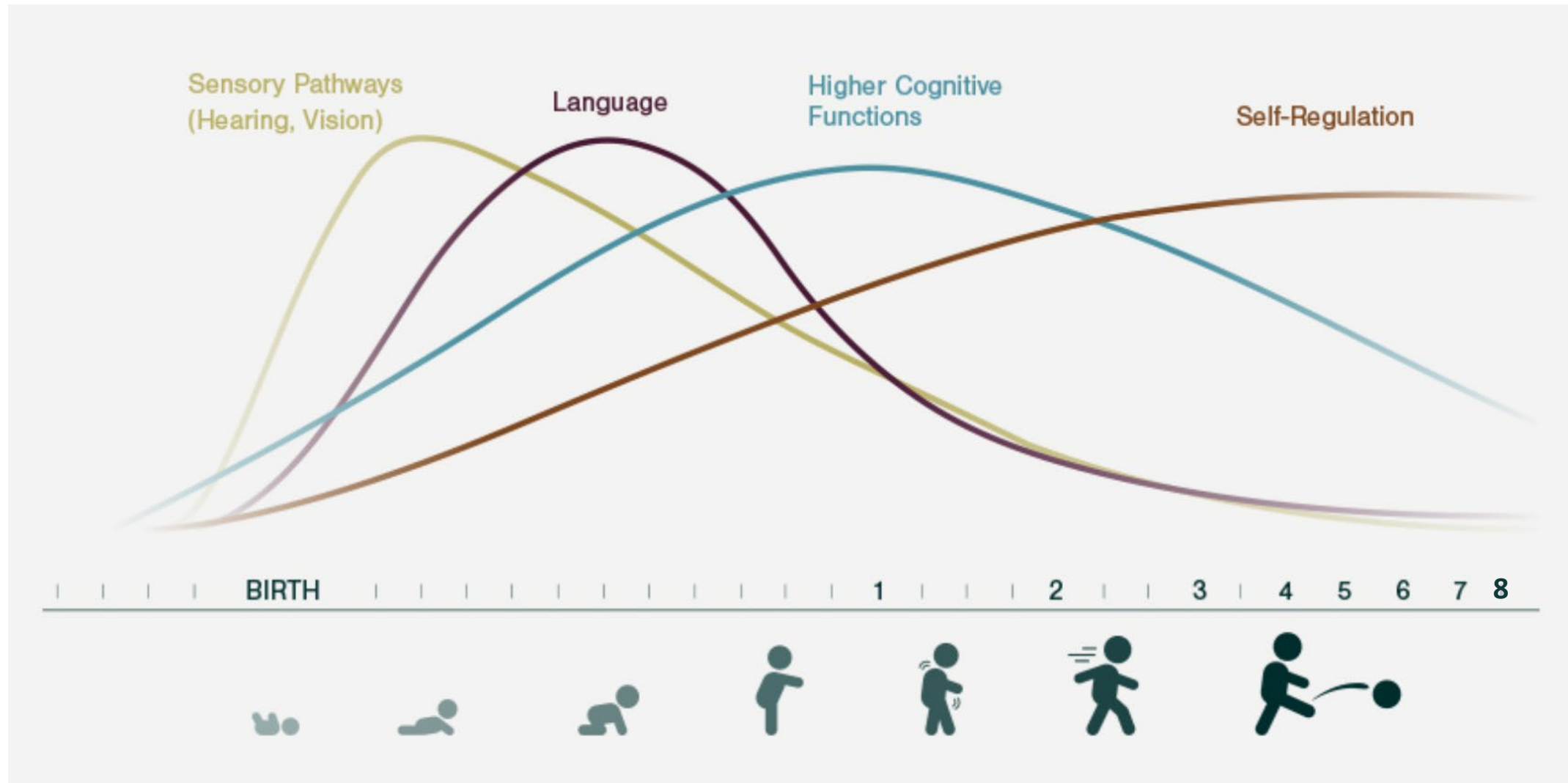
The investments we make today in disadvantaged young children promote social mobility, create opportunity, and foster a vibrant, healthy, and inclusive society and economy.

- James J. Heckman, Nobel Prize-winning University of Chicago Professor

Why it Matters: Early Childhood is Serious Business!



A Child's Developing Brain



The three types of ACEs include

ABUSE



Physical



Emotional



Sexual

NEGLECT



Physical



Emotional

HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION



Mental Illness



Mother treated violently



Divorce



Incarcerated Relative



Substance Abuse

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Nurturing the Future: Investing in Early Childhood Development



EARLY CHILDHOOD ACTION PLAN



Our Vision for NC's Children:

All North Carolina children will get a healthy start and develop to their full potential in safe and nurturing families, schools and communities.

Our Guiding Principles



Children and families are at the center of our work.



Brain and developmental science are fundamental.



Alleviate inequity to ensure that all of North Carolina's children can reach their fullest potential.



Build upon existing strengths and partnerships in early childhood systems.



Set bold priorities and achievable goals for North Carolina's young children.



Track progress toward all goals, ensuring transparency, accountability, and good stewardship of resources.



Healthy

Children are healthy at birth and thrive in environments that support their optimal health and well-being

Healthy | 2025 GOALS



1. HEALTHY BABIES



2. PREVENTIVE HEALTH SERVICES



3. FOOD SECURITY



1. HEALTHY BABIES

Babies across North Carolina from all backgrounds will have a healthy start in their first year of life.

- NC has the 11th highest infant mortality rate in the country.
- The African American infant mortality rate in NC is over twice as high as the white infant mortality rate.

2025 Target

Decrease the statewide infant mortality disparity ratio from 2.5 to 1.92, according to data provided by the State Center for Health Statistics

Sub-Targets

Percent of babies born at a low birth weight

Percent of young women with a preventive health visit in last year

Percent of infants who are ever breastfed

Percent of mothers indicating their pregnancy was intended

Percent of families living at or below 200% of the federal poverty level



2. PREVENTIVE HEALTH SERVICES

Babies, toddlers, young children, and their families will have regular, ongoing access to high-quality health services.

- Nearly one third of children ages 3-6-years-old enrolled in NC Medicaid or Health Choice do not receive on time well-child visits.
- Almost 20% of NC heads of household with young children do not have health insurance.

2025 Target

Increase the percentage of North Carolina’s young children enrolled in Medicaid and Health Choice who receive regular well-child visits as recommended for certain age groups, according to data provided through NC Medicaid and HEDIS measures:

- For children ages 0 – 15 months, increase from 61.9% to 68.7%.
- For children ages 3 – 6 years, increase from 69.3% to 78.5%.

Sub-Targets

Percent of individuals with health insurance (Children + adults)

Percent children who are up-to-date on immunizations

Percent of children enrolled in Medicaid aged 2 – 10 who had an annual dental visit

Percent of children with four or more varnishings

Percent of families living at or below 200% of the federal poverty level



3. FOOD SECURITY

Babies, toddlers, young children and their families across North Carolina will have access to enough healthy food every day.

- Over 1 in 5 children across North Carolina face hunger.

2025 Target

Decrease the percentage of children living across North Carolina in food insecure homes from 20.9% to 17.5% according to data provided by Feeding America.

Sub-Targets

Percent of eligible families receiving WIC

Children under 18 with low access to food

Rates of young children who are overweight or obese

Percent of families living at or below 200% of the federal poverty level



Safe and Nurtured

Children grow confident, resilient and independent in safe, stable, and nurturing families, schools and communities

Safe and Nurtured | 2025 GOALS



4. SAFE AND SECURE HOUSING



5. SAFE AND NURTURING RELATIONSHIPS



6. PERMANENT FAMILIES FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE



7. SOCIAL EMOTIONAL HEALTH AND RESILIENCE



4. SAFE AND SECURE HOUSING

Babies, toddlers, young children and their families across North Carolina will have access to safe, secure and affordable housing.

- Over 26,000 NC children under age 6 are homeless, or roughly 1 in 28.

2025 Target

Part 1) Decrease the percentage of children across North Carolina under age six experiencing homelessness by 10% from 26,198 to 23,578, according to data from the Administration for Children and Families (ACF).

Part 2) Decrease the number of children K – third grade enrolled in NC public schools experiencing homelessness by 10% from 9,970 to 8,973, according to data provided by the NC Department of Public Instruction.

Sub-Targets

Percent of families with a high housing cost burden

Number of homeless children in early learning programs

Rate of emergency asthma care visits

Rate of confirmed elevated blood levels

Percent of families living at or below 200% of the federal poverty level



5. SAFE AND NURTURING RELATIONSHIPS

Babies, toddlers and young children across North Carolina will grow up with safe and nurturing family and caregiver relationships.

- Children under age 4 make up over half of substantiated child maltreatment cases.



Decrease by 10% the rate of children in North Carolina who are substantiated victims of maltreatment*

- For ages 0 – 3, reduce from 20.1 to 18.1 per 1000 children
- For ages 4 – 5, reduce from 14.5 to 13.1 per 1,000 children
- For ages 6 – 8, reduce from 13.4 to 12.1 per 1,000 children

All data for this target is provided by the Division of Social Services Central Registry, and NC FAST.

* In setting this target, it is critical to note the limitations of these data, including that minority populations are disproportionately reported, investigated, and substantiated for cases of maltreatment.



Percent of young children with two or more ACES

Rate of maternal screenings (for depression)

Rate of emergency department visits for injuries to young children



6. PERMANENT FAMILIES FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

Babies, toddlers and young children across North Carolina will grow up with safe and nurturing family and caregiver relationships.

- More than half of 4- and 5-year-olds in NC’s foster care system spend over 1,000 days in foster care before being adopted.



Part 1) Reunification: Decrease the number of days it takes for a child in the foster care system to be reunified with his or her family, if appropriate.

- For children aged 0-3 years, decrease the median number of days from 371 to 334
- For children aged 4-5 years, decrease the median number of days from 390 days to 351 days
- For children aged 6-8 years, decrease the median number of days from 371 to 334

Part 2) Adoption: Decrease the number of days it takes for a child in the foster care system to be adopted, if reunification is not appropriate.

- For children aged 0-3 years, decrease the median number of days from 822 to 730
- For children aged 4-5 years, decrease the median number of days from 1,006 to 730
- For children aged 6-8 years, decrease the median number of days from 988 to 730



Percent of child welfare cases that are adjudicated within 60 days

Percent of child welfare cases that have an initial permanency planning hearing within 12 months of removal from the home

Median number of days to termination of parental rights



7. SOCIAL EMOTIONAL WELL- BEING AND RESILIENCE

Babies, toddlers and young children across North Carolina will express, recognize and manage their emotions in a healthy way, especially under stress.

- Data not yet available. Promising data sources include the Survey of Well-being of Young Children (SWYC), and select indicators on the National Survey of Children’s Health (NSCH).



Become a national leader in developing a statewide measure of social-emotional health and resilience, and make steady progress on improving children’s social-emotional health and resilience.



Data not yet available



Learning and Ready to Succeed

Children experience the conditions they need to build strong brain architecture and skills that support their success in school and life

Learning & Ready to Succeed | 2025 GOALS



8. HIGH-QUALITY EARLY LEARNING



9. ON TRACK FOR SCHOOL SUCCESS



10. READING AT GRADE LEVEL



8. HIGH-QUALITY EARLY LEARNING

Babies, toddlers and young children across North Carolina will have access to high-quality opportunities to engage in early learning.

- Less than half of eligible children, approximately 30,000, are enrolled in NC Pre-K.
- Nearly 12% of an NC family’s income is devoted to infant care.
- Roughly one in five eligible children under age 5, approximately 46,000, receive child care subsidy in NC.



Part 1) By 2025, increase the percentage of income-eligible children enrolled in NC Pre-K statewide from 47% to 75%.

Part 2) By 2025, decrease the percent of family income spent on child care from its current range of 10 – 11.6% to 7%



Percent of eligible children whose families receive child care subsidy and are enrolled in 4- or 5-star centers and homes

Percent of eligible children enrolled in Head Start

Percent of early childhood teachers with post-secondary early childhood education

Workforce turnover: statewide separation rates for full-time teachers



9. ON TRACK FOR SCHOOL SUCCESS

Young children across North Carolina will enter kindergarten on track for reaching their developmental goals.

- Over 70% of children ages 0-3-years-old enrolled in NC Medicaid receive a developmental screening.
- Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA) data is not yet available.

2025 Target

Increase the percentage of children across North Carolina who enter kindergarten developmentally on-track

Sub-Targets

Percent of children enrolled in Medicaid receiving general developmental screening in first 3 years of life

Percent of children who receive early intervention and early childhood special education services to address developmental risks and delays as compared to NC Census data

Percent of children receiving early intervention and early childhood special education services to address developmental risks and delays who demonstrate improved positive social-emotional skills and acquisition and use of knowledge and skills



10. READING AT GRADE LEVEL

Young children across North Carolina will read on grade-level in elementary school, with a particular focus on African American, American Indian and Hispanic children who face the greatest systemic barriers to reading success.

- Less than half, 45%, of North Carolina third graders read above proficiency on state EOGs.
- Less than 40% of NC’s fourth graders read proficiently on the NAEP.



Part 1) Increase reading proficiency from 45.8% to 61.8% for 3rd – 8th grade students on statewide end of grade tests (EOGs), consistent with the state’s Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Plan 2025 reading proficiency benchmark

Part 2) Increase reading proficiency from 39% to 43% according to the fourth grade National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)



3rd grade reading End of Grade (EOG) exams proficiency rates

4th grade reading National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores for priority populations

Percent of students reading or exhibiting pre-literacy behaviors at or above grade level by the end of the year according to mCLASS: Reading 3D

Percent of families living at or below 200% of the federal poverty level

Why Us?

- We have a track record of success
- We know more than ever to help us make good choices
- We have more tools in our toolbox to make things better
- We have a culture of caring for our own and each other
- We own our shared responsibility
- We have leaders committed to building a better future for children and state today



We've got this!



Take Action Today: ncdhhs.gov/early-childhood