

# Ages 3-5 Strategy Development Process

Executive Summary





## What?

Ready for School, Ready for Life (Ready Ready) and The Duke Endowment convened a community-driven stakeholder process to inform recommendations for strategies that could be implemented in Guilford County to facilitate changes in a range of early childhood outcomes and disparities. The goal of the recommended strategies is to improve the lives of Guilford County children ages three to five years, with an emphasis on improving kindergarten readiness.

## Why?

The recommended strategies will be used as the basis for a proposal to The Blue Meridian Partners to request funding to continue and expand Guilford County's efforts to improve outcomes for children entering kindergarten, and to inform other partnerships and initiatives invested in improving the lives of three- to five-year olds in Guilford County.

## Who?

A community-based Design Team of 39 stakeholders from Guilford County was convened to develop the recommendations. The Design Team consisted of parent leaders and professionals from a variety of roles. A leadership team from Ready Ready, the Duke Endowment, and UNC Greensboro, as well as an Advisory Team of national and regional experts from a variety of perspectives, supported the Design Team's decision-making process. Ad hoc Planning Teams were also formed to offer suggestions in each of the following areas: Advocacy and Policy, Communication and Outreach, and Navigation.

## When?

The Design Team met virtually on a biweekly basis between December 2020 and June 2021.



## What informed the recommendations?

The Design Team's process was informed by Ready Ready's values and principles:

- We believe in being Family-Led.
- We believe in being Inclusive.
- We believe in being Equity-driven.
- We believe in being Responsive to Evidence.
- We believe in being Transparent.
- We believe in being Collaborative.

The recommendations were based on a variety of sources of data, including:

- An extensive scan of population-level data to describe children and families, early care and education services, social and medical services, and child outcomes related to school readiness in Guilford County.
- Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and geographic analyses using data from the US Census American Community Survey and data from other county-level agencies and sources.
- Twelve focus groups were conducted for the process, three with parents/caregivers, six with ECE professionals, and three with other types of professionals working with families and children.
- Interviews with parents and professionals working with families with young children.
- A community survey with responses from over 880 individuals representing a wide range of perspectives, including parents, professionals, and other members of the Guilford County community.

## What was recommended for the community?

A total of 10 strategies were recommended. The recommended strategies fall into three general categories:

- Families/Early Literacy
- Mental Health/Social & Emotional Development
- Early Childhood Education (ECE)



### **Families/Early Literacy**

1) To improve children's early literacy skills, implement a county-wide effort to promote active reading with children. Along with a public relations campaign, consider selecting evidence-based curricula or programs to implement across settings (public libraries, home-based care, child care centers, etc.) to encourage adults to read frequently with children, focusing on families reading with children more at home.\*

2) To improve connections between families and resources, utilize a peer support model where community members are trained to increase families' awareness of and access to resources. Trainees will be community members with shared experiences with families and likely will support the work of Navigators.

3) To ensure all families have equitable access to books at home, coordinate among the network of existing book distribution efforts to expand reach to all families and ensure they have age- and culturally-appropriate books.

### **Mental Health/Social & Emotional Development**

4) To improve adults' and children's social-emotional development, implement and expand evidence-based curricula targeting children ages 3-5. Plan to train adults serving children in various settings, such as educational and medical settings, so that they are better equipped to help children positively manage their emotions.\*

5) To reduce barriers in accessing timely mental health supports, offer coordinated mental health consultations and referrals for young children and their families in early childhood education and Navigation settings.

### **Early Childhood Education (ECE)**

6) To increase alignment between ECE programs and the school system, implement coordinated activities, including offering joint professional development between child care center staff and kindergarten teachers and offering transition supports to families (e.g., coaching, virtual school tours, etc.).\*

7) To promote collaboration to increase the quality and quantity of ECE programs, convene an ECE Leadership Council to assess needs and assets to make data-driven decisions about how to improve quality, quantity, and equitable access to ECE services.

8) To promote the professional development and retention of a highly qualified ECE workforce, develop a coordinated ECE Professional Development Pathway. Partners would define a common progression of credentials and professional development, plan for supports such as a coach to create professional development plans with ECE staff, and establish a fair compensation scale with increases as educators seek additional professional development.

9) To reduce silos across ECE programs and recruit talented and passionate professionals, coordinate a county-wide strategy to recruit new professionals into the ECE workforce. The county could implement shared messaging and recruitment strategies, with targeted outreach to underrepresented professionals in ECE.

10) To optimize summer learning experiences, extend schools' and public libraries' hours and provide resources to promote early literacy development, such as coaching families in active reading strategies.



## Next Steps

A community-driven stakeholder Implementation Planning process was convened in January and February 2022 to make recommendations regarding how to move three strategies forward toward piloting. The three strategies were selected through an evaluation process guided by the Hexagon Tool in consultation with partners at the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN), and are the strategies noted with an \* above. Additional work to move the remaining strategies forward toward implementation will be initiated later in 2022.

*James B. Duke*

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THE DUKE ENDOWMENT

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