



# Enhancing and Aligning State Programs to Achieve Early Childhood Goals in North Carolina

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NC DHHS), Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) and Third Sector collaborated through the Empowering Families Initiative to accelerate the goals of the state's Early Childhood Action Plan by enhancing and aligning the NC Pre-Kindergarten (NC Pre-K) and the Promoting Healthy Social Behavior in Child Care Centers (HSB) programs to support those goals.

DCDEE contracts with a range of service providers in support of achieving the state's vision for young children. Contracts with providers have focused heavily on measuring success through output and compliance indicators, such as dollars spent and the number of children served. Contracts have placed less attention on achieving mid- to longer-term outcomes like child developmental goals attained. Contracts lacked two-way data-sharing agreements and pre-post assessment test performance reviews between the state and providers. Without these tools, it was difficult to foster continuous improvement, outcomes achievement, and outcomes validation.

"The practical application of Third Sector's recommendations [on service contracts] has created a critical appreciation for how valuable their technical assistance was... I don't think we would have gotten there without them."

– Anna Carter, Former Director of DCDEE

## RESULTS

The changes set in motion by this project are driving a fundamental shift in the way service providers deliver and the children and early childhood workforce of North Carolina receive services.

**Outcomes-Focused Service Delivery:** Across the NC Pre-K and HSB programs over \$165 million in services are being deployed across 90+ contracts. These contracts aim to support 5,000+ teachers and staff to drive better outcomes, such as improved kindergarten readiness, literary scores, and social and emotional development for 34,000+ children.

- **North Carolina Pre-Kindergarten Program,** which provides high-quality pre-kindergarten educational experiences to enhance school readiness for eligible four-year-old children across the state, will take a multi-year, phased approach to becoming outcomes-based. It will develop baselines, systems, and program enhancements in the first phase and then implement incentives for program quality and outcomes in future phases.

- **Promoting Healthy Social Behaviors in Child Care Centers Program**, which provides specialized consultation, technical assistance, and training focused on identifying, preventing, and addressing challenging behaviors and promoting social and emotional development of children in early childhood centers will begin to focus on outcomes immediately. The HSB program will pilot financial incentives for teachers to receive specialized training on the Pyramid Model and achieve a high level of fidelity implementation during service delivery.

#### **Continuous Improvement in Service Delivery:**

DCDEE has strengthened the way it works with the 90+ providers that deliver the NC Pre-K and HSB programs. Both parties will share and receive data to support real-time continuous improvement in service delivery and drive better provider performance. DCDEE will also host provider convenings to review data and to provide a platform to share learnings, successes, and challenges.

## **ACTION**

Project activities focused on developing a division-wide vision that fit the DCDEE's context and aligned to the Early Childhood Action Plan goals such as kindergarten readiness, improved reading and math scores, and social and emotional development.

- **Starting Point:** Third Sector worked closely with DCDEE to assess its contracts and contracting processes. This assessment generated a deep understanding of existing contract groupings and the readiness for contracts and systems to focus on outcome goals.
- **Realizing the Vision:** An initial cohort of contracts was selected using criteria such as organization priority, data availability, and provider receptivity, with the goal of implementing a new focus on priority mid- to longer-term early childhood outcomes.

- **Plan to Scale Division-Wide:** To build off of the changes implemented with this first cohort of contracts, Third Sector built a toolkit, including a roadmap for developing outcomes-focused contract, to enable DCDEE to transition other contracts to be outcomes-focused and to actively work towards the vision for the Division.



"We wanted to rethink contracting and asked ourselves: can it be done more effectively, in a way that's more impactful."

— Anna Carter, Former Director, DCDEE

## **ABOUT**

**North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services** of which the Division of Child Development and Early Education is a part, manages the delivery of health- and human-related services for all North Carolinians, especially its most vulnerable citizens – children, elderly, disabled and low-income families.

**Empowering Families** was a national cohort of government agencies that received technical assistance from Third Sector to support improved outcomes for children and families through the use of outcomes-oriented contracting. The initiative was funded by a Social Innovation Fund grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service.

**Third Sector** is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that is transforming the way communities connect people with human services. We partner with governments, providers, and their partners to generate positive, measurable outcomes for the people they serve.

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