

North Carolina Should Focus on Early Childhood Learning in Order to Raise Achievement in Predominantly Economically Disadvantaged School Districts

Program Evaluation Division, North Carolina General Assembly

May 20, 2019

Background Information

- The gap in student achievement between predominantly economically disadvantaged districts and more advantaged districts is present by 3rd grade and does not significantly grow after 3rd grade.
 - In North Carolina:
 - 45 of 115 districts are predominantly economically disadvantaged – representing 39% of districts, considerably higher than the national average of 18%.
 - Only 7 of those 45 districts (16%) performed at grade level – compared to 5% nationally.
 - This report analyzes what is occurring in predominantly economically disadvantaged school districts that results in their students achieving at grade level or above.¹
-

Key Findings

- Higher-performing, predominantly disadvantaged districts separate themselves from other disadvantaged districts by demonstrating high achievement in 3rd grade.
- The “main pathway” to higher performance in disadvantaged districts is “securing high student achievement in the early education years instead of focusing primarily on achieving above average academic growth after third grade.”
- **In 2017, four (4) of the five (5) North Carolina counties evaluated had 75 percent or more of their eligible children participating in NC Pre-K.**
- Other differentiating factors in successful districts were:
 - Increasing or maximizing student learning time for struggling readers.
 - Seeking additional resources to maximize instruction.
 - Recruiting/retaining high-quality teachers.
 - Using data and coaching to improve instruction.
- Recommendations:
 - Require low-performing school districts to include efforts to expand NC Pre-K participation in their improvement plans.
 - Require an assessment of early childhood learning as part of the Department of Public Instruction’s comprehensive needs assessment process for districts.

1. https://www.ncleg.net/PED/Reports/documents/Disadvantaged_Schools/DisadvantagedSchools_Report.pdf The evaluation included 12 districts, six (6) from North Carolina (Alleghany, Jones and Wilkes Counties, plus Hickory and Whiteville City schools) and the others from Oklahoma, Tennessee, Kentucky and Ohio.