

Policy recommendations to increase third-grade literacy in North Carolina

1 Implement a comprehensive, coordinated system that ensures accountability and alignment of birth through age 8 programs that put children on the pathway to grade-level reading.

The General Assembly has directed the creation of a comprehensive approach to early childhood education, from birth through third grade, with the goal of increasing third-grade reading proficiency. This structure should be designed to maximize program, funding, and administrative efficiencies. It also needs clear accountability through every step of implementation and operation to ensure alignment and achieve positive results.

2 Develop connected data systems that track children's progress and allow for early interventions to keep them progressing toward third-grade literacy.

To know how well students are doing from birth through third grade requires an understanding of multiple indicators impacting early literacy. The most critical of those indicators have been identified by the NC Pathways to Grade Level Reading initiative. Those indicators – and any other relevant data – should be collected, managed and analyzed as part of a secure, connected system designed to increase third-grade reading proficiency.

3 Expand access to NC Pre-K to give greater numbers of children an opportunity to achieve reading proficiency by third grade.

Extensive research confirms that high-quality pre-K programs are the foundation for a comprehensive literacy development system. Children in programs like NC Pre-K are better prepared to enter kindergarten, have higher literacy rates and math skills, and are less likely to be held back a grade or placed in a special education program. They also have increased rates of high school graduation and enrollment in post-secondary education and training. "High quality" is key to these lasting benefits.

