

# State of Durham County's Young Children

## Recommendations for the Community

**C**hildren in Durham come from diverse backgrounds, which contributes to the rich cultural tapestry that makes Durham a special place to live and work.

However, significant differences are apparent among segments of Durham's overall population when it comes to early childhood experiences, health and learning—all factors that play an important role in nurturing young children and preparing them for adulthood.

These differences are particularly striking among children from different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds and, to a large extent, they define the challenges facing policy makers in Durham as they work to enrich the lives and opportunities for current and future generations.

As a result, the State of Durham County's Young Children Task Force developed recommendations for the community in an effort to improve the lives of the county's youngest residents.

### #1 RECOMMENDATION

Provide trauma-informed services in a systemic way to build resiliency in young children. These services include screening for adverse childhood experiences and training parents and school personnel to address trauma in children so that they can reach their full potential.

### Adverse Childhood Experiences

More than a quarter of Durham's young children live in a home where the head of household's income is at or below poverty level. These economic struggles in Durham are highly correlated with race and ethnicity.

A lack of resources in other areas can also affect children's well-being,<sup>1</sup> and research has documented both immediate and lasting harms associated with adverse childhood experiences.<sup>2</sup>

While it is difficult to determine the number of children affected by adverse childhood experiences in Durham, some statistics do indicate a need for services that focus on the county's most vulnerable children. For example, among Durham children ages zero to eight, it is estimated in 2015 that:

- 5 percent were the subject of a maltreatment report.
- 16 percent lived in a home where housing costs exceeded 50 percent of income.
- 15 percent lived in crowded housing.
- 7 percent lived in a household where there was no working parent.

To ensure children's later success, these numbers illustrate the need for Durham to address the holistic needs of young children.

### Birth and Maternal Health

Prenatal care is vital to ensuring infants enter the world healthy, and timely prenatal care is associated with better birth outcomes.<sup>3</sup> About a third of Durham's babies in 2015 were born to mothers who did not receive prenatal care in their first trimester.

Relative to black and Hispanic women, white women in Durham are much more likely to receive prenatal care in their first trimester.

### #2 RECOMMENDATION

To ensure that Durham County infants enter the world healthy, increase efforts to educate the community about preconception and prenatal services available in Durham. Outreach efforts should focus in particular on the Hispanic and black communities.



## Early Childhood

High-quality early child care and education help set the stage for healthy child development. The average cost of child care in Durham greatly exceeds the federal benchmark of 7 percent of a family's income.<sup>4</sup> There is also a lack of capacity for early care and learning. Spots in licensed centers and in home-based care are available for only 45 percent of infants and toddlers and 66 percent of preschool-aged children.

While many children may be cared for by relatives or friends, a lack of affordability and capacity for early child care and education in Durham may contribute to a lack of preparedness once children enter school. As a group, 38 percent of Durham children enter kindergarten with a reading proficiency at grade level. However, a higher percentage of white children enter kindergarten reading at grade level than minority children.

Research has found that high-quality pre-kindergarten programs can create an enhanced learning environment for all children regardless of poverty level.<sup>5</sup>

**#3 RECOMMENDATION**  
Improve the availability, affordability and quality of early child care and education in Durham, with the goal of improving all children's preparedness for kindergarten.

## Kindergarten to Grade 3

The lack of an early foundation presents challenges for Durham's elementary schools. The ability to read by the end of third grade is a key educational benchmark. In later grades, schools rely on students' reading ability to aid their learning.<sup>6</sup>

Data show that 47 percent of Durham third graders in public and charter schools in 2014-15 scored at or above grade level in reading. While this is substantially higher than the 38 percent of students who entered kindergarten reading at grade level, it is nearly 12 percentage points lower than the state average of 59 percent. A contributing factor to Durham's low third grade proficiency rates may be the relatively large proportion of students with limited English proficiency.

**#4 RECOMMENDATION**  
Expand educational and support services in grades kindergarten through third so Durham's children meet or exceed the state average for reading and math proficiency.

## Data

In researching this report, we found that data are not available on many important health and well-being indicators for young children.

Given the importance of early interventions in establishing a life-long pattern of mental and physical well-being, it is important for Durham County to know in greater detail what issues its youngest residents face.

**#5 RECOMMENDATION**  
Improve data collection across agencies and age groups so that community stakeholders can continue to identify the areas of greatest need and to track progress in these areas that have been identified as a focus. Better data tracking will also determine if efforts to improve the quality of life for Durham County's young children are successful.

## References

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This report was commissioned by the State of Durham County's Young Children Task Force. Research and writing of the report were done by the Duke Center for Child and Family Policy. To read the full report, visit [childandfamilypolicy.duke.edu/durhams-young-children](http://childandfamilypolicy.duke.edu/durhams-young-children).