

# CREATING EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS IN PARTNERSHIP WITH YOUR COMMUNITY



“I want my child to have every opportunity to succeed—to follow their dreams.”

Before Edgecombe County Public Schools (ECPS) launched its early childhood learning program, the team started with important questions: what does our community want for our kids? What do our littlest learners need? These questions jumpstarted a critical community feedback process, through which families and early learning leaders helped design ECPS’s early learning programs.

## Why Start With Community Engagement?

Sarah, a 3 year old, is nervous about starting school without her sister—but what if they could attend an early learning program together? Perhaps Jamie, a local parent, can only enroll her child in a program if it’s located within 10 miles of her home. What if the program was at her local library that she can easily reach?

By starting with community engagement, districts can build a strong understanding about what community members need and value, what they are excited about and what may stop them from participating in early learning initiatives. District leaders can then create programs that serve community members well, ensuring programs are attended, loved and supportive.

## How ECPS Engaged Parents, Caregivers and the Community

To build community feedback and data into its early learning programs, the ECPS team:

- Conducted interviews with local students and parents through phone calls, ensuring families both with and without internet access could participate
- Explored early learning location options, so the team could serve families from every ECPS community
- Led discussions with early childhood educators and advocates
- Analyzed in-depth research studies and best practices focused on early learning programs
- Identified key themes from each research phase, connecting data about best practices with the community’s needs





# THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

The ECPS team created a program that would meet parent and caregiver values by first asking families:

- ▶ What are your hopes and dreams for your child(ren)?
- ▶ What do you think is needed to make these hopes and dreams come true?
- ▶ How do you want your child to spend most of their time at their current age? (Make sure to note the children's ages.)
- ▶ What kind of learning environment and experiences would you like for your child BEFORE they enter kindergarten?
- ▶ What kind of learning environment would you like for your child once they are in elementary, middle and high school?
- ▶ The school system would like all children to have access to a strong Pre-K program. What can we do to make that possible for your child and all children in our community?
- ▶ Is there anything we haven't asked about that you want to share? Anything that would be important for us to know as we build programs for our kids?

## Your Plan, For Your Community

When district leaders build early learning programs in their communities, it should be customized to the needs of their littlest learners and families. This means every plan will look different—but districts can continue learning from one another about what's working for communities and kids!

## Learn More and Start Your Early Learning Plan

When kids are ready for kindergarten, they are more likely to thrive for a lifetime—and when children succeed, the entire community wins. You can learn more about ECPS's early learning work, and how you can begin or partner in this work, by visiting [tipnc.org/early-learning](https://tipnc.org/early-learning).

