

# Small Steps Toward Big Dreams



## March 2022

Report by

**Isadora Sharon**, Evaluator

**Dawn Arledge**, Executive Director

**Barbara Browning**, Associate Director

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report was made possible by funding from The California Endowment – Building Healthy Communities-Del Norte and Tribal Lands.

The California Center for Rural Policy would like to thank:

- ✓ Geneva Wiki & Kate Shea Ennis, The California Endowment
- ✓ Michelle Carillo, Building Healthy Communities, Del Norte and Tribal Lands
- ✓ Gina Zottola, Wild Rivers Community Foundation
- ✓ Leslie Taraq & Cate Shaw, ThinkPlace
- ✓ Jessica Ortiz, Del Norte County Childcare Council
- ✓ Literacy Core Design Team Members: Angela Glore, Melodee Mitchell, Lisa Howard, Lindy Hollaway, Amira Long, Kevin Hartwick
- ✓ DNATL parents and care providers who participated in the empathy research
- ✓ Community members who supported this work
- ✓ Members of the School System Implementation Team
- ✓ Del Norte Unified School District
- ✓ Del Norte Child Care Council
- ✓ First 5 Del Norte
- ✓ Howonquet Head Start
- ✓ Family Resource Center of the Redwoods
- ✓ Del Norte Library District
- ✓ Connie Stewart, Executive Director of Initiatives, Cal Poly Humboldt
- ✓ Jeff Harris, Del Norte County Office of Education
- ✓ Tom Jackson Jr., President, Cal Poly Humboldt

## Suggested Citation

Case Study: Building Healthy Communities DNATL - Literacy Campaign  
Sharon, I., Browning, B., Arledge, D. Case Study: Building Healthy Communities DNATL - Literacy Campaign, California Center for Rural Policy, Cal Poly Humboldt. December 2021

The California Center for Rural Policy at Cal Poly Humboldt is a research and policy center committed to informing policy, building community, and promoting the health and well-being of people and environments.

### Cal Poly Humboldt

California Center for Rural Policy  
1 Harpst Street, Arcata, CA 95521  
707.826.3400  
[ccrp@humboldt.edu](mailto:ccrp@humboldt.edu)  
[humboldt.edu/ccrp/](http://humboldt.edu/ccrp/)

# Contents

---

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>METHODS</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>FINDINGS</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>DISCUSSION</b>	<b>8</b>
3Read23 Campaign	8
The Empathy Research Process	10
The Literacy Symposium	13
Mapping Out Solutions – Walk Throughs	13
<b>3READ23 CAMPAIGN PROJECTS</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>APPENDIX</b>	<b>24</b>

---

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Early education is critical for a child's overall development and success in school. Literacy has a profound effect on the health and wellness of children and adults. According to the Del Norte Unified School District, in 2011, about 66% of children entering kindergarten in Del Norte did not have the skills they needed to succeed by third grade, and 50% could not read at the appropriate grade level. With the help of Del Norte and Tribal Lands (DNATL) Building Healthy Communities (BHC) Initiative, a coalition of families, educators, early child care providers, local business owners, and agencies came together to improve literacy

among children. The coalition made a collective commitment to ensure that all children in (DNATL) have the skills they need to be ready for kindergarten and read at grade level by third grade.

The DNATL BHC Literacy Initiative was a community-wide effort to increase access to quality preschool, improve kindergarten readiness, and increase literacy rates among third graders. The case study tells the story of DNATL's literacy campaign and examines how policy makers and grant funders can support community-led efforts in remote and rural communities to plan and implement policy and system change within the education sector.

## The most significant findings suggest the following:

1

Community-based research, such as qualitative data from the empathy interviews, was essential to understand the complex barriers parents and educators experience in ensuring children can succeed in school.

2

DNATL literacy champions experienced an outpouring of support from the broader community. The broader community mobilized around the issue of literacy and supported efforts in a variety of ways.

The case study concludes with recommendations for increasing access to quality preschool, kindergarten readiness, and literacy rates among third graders.

## Background- Building Healthy Communities in DNATL, Focus on Literacy

The Del Norte County and Tribal Lands (DNATL) Building Healthy Communities (BHC) initiative is a collaborative of residents, community organizations and service providers working together to make DNATL the model of a healthy rural community. To achieve this, the program focused on five core areas during its decade of operation in the county. Each of these program areas forms the basis of an exploratory case study published in this series: achieving a healthy food system, creating health career pathways, empowering youth, rural organizing for health, and the focus of this study, childhood literacy.

The work being done in DNATL by the California Endowment, research partner California Center for Rural Policy (CCRP), and a large network of community partners, offers important insights on overcoming typical health challenges faced in remote, under-resourced rural areas. In 2010 the total population in DNATL was 29,067 (28,610 in Del Norte County and 457 in the adjacent tribal lands), with a population density of 28 people per square mile. In 2016, it remained predominantly white (63%). The population is growing and the racial and ethnic composition is becoming more diverse with a proportionately larger increase in people who identify as Latino (19%) and Native American (6%). The area is designated as medically underserved and a health professional shortage area for primary care, mental health, and dental care.

The region's major economic activities in the past were natural resource extractive industries, such as timber, fishing, and mining. Jobs in these industries are severely diminished today, and the economy largely depends on public sector jobs. State and national parks, a state maximum-security prison, and local authorities make the government the county's principal employer. Health care and social assistance provide another quarter of the jobs.

Despite the abundant natural resources, DNATL faces many challenges, including high rates of substance abuse, low rates of high school graduation and post-secondary degrees, and

high unemployment. It is against these odds that residents, educators, business owners, and other community partners came together to create a healthier DNATL.

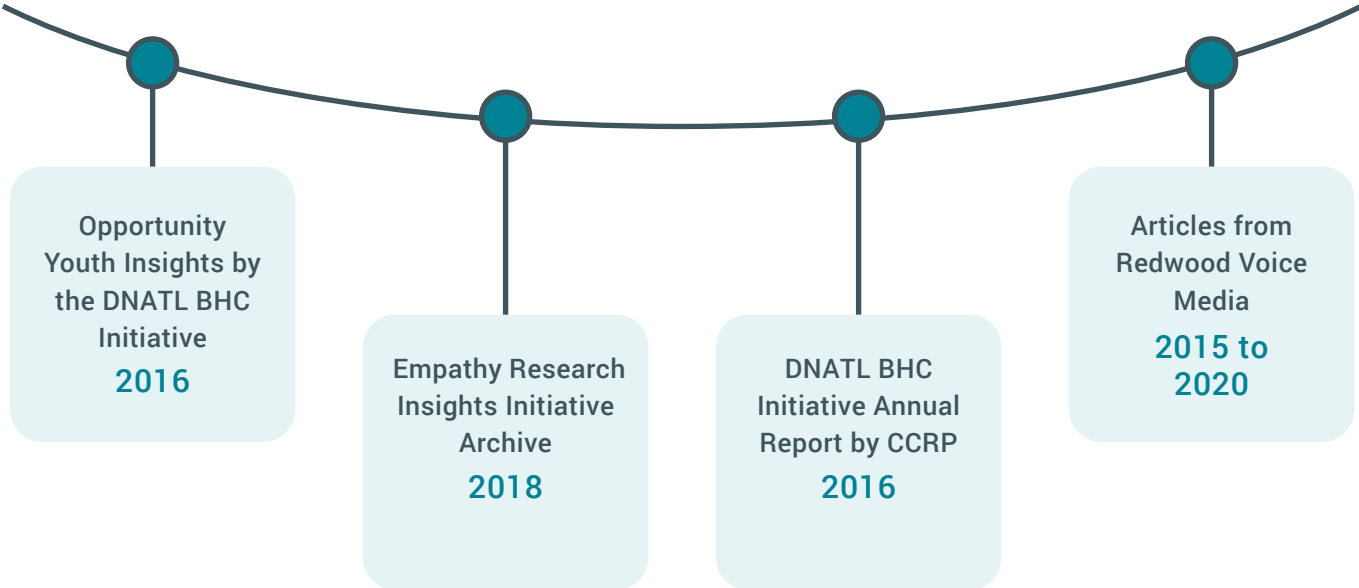
The DNATL BHC initiative generated four key factors that together help to achieve systemic change. These factors are:

- 01 Building and strengthening individual and collective capacities.
- 02 Using design teams to establish innovative, systemic prototype initiatives.
- 03 Gathering in-depth understandings and insights by utilizing the human centered design process.
- 04 Creating strong, trusting relationships among key players in the system.

In order to achieve these goals, the DNATL BHC Initiative employed the principles of Human Centered Design (HCD) in its work with Del Norte communities. HCD is an approach to innovation with roots in the technology design world and ethnographic, anthropological methods. HCD values the perspectives, experiences, and knowledge of those most affected by the challenges and potential solutions. While there are varied approaches to HCD, the general phases are: 1) Establish an understanding of the community through observation and inquiry to identify key needs and issues, 2) Analyze information and brainstorm any and all possible solutions, 3) Reflect with collaborative partners about what was heard and ideas generated, check for inaccuracies or misunderstandings, 4) Identify most promising way forward, 5) Implement, and keep iterating feedback collection and refining of solutions to meet ever shifting contexts and improve on the design. The purpose of applying the human centered design methodology was to ensure that residents drive potential solutions for the community. HCD is used to prevent top-down solutions that do not work.

# METHODS

This exploratory case study applies a retrospective, qualitative methodology and archival analysis to describe the success of a foundation-supported, community-driven campaign to improve literacy outcomes in Del Norte County California. Since 2010, the California Center for Rural Policy has been collaborating with the DNATL BHC Youth Initiative by conducting evaluations and supporting community-led programs' research needs. For this case study, CCRP analyzed several existing sources and databases including:



CCRP also conducted key informant interviews in 2019 and 2020, with community partners involved over the ten years of the DNATL BHC Literacy Initiative. The interviews asked participants to reflect on their experience and discuss the lessons they learned. In addition to interviewing DNATL BHC Literacy Initiative members and partners, CCRP collected and analyzed various materials produced by the DNATL BHC Literacy Initiative.

# FINDINGS

## Finding 1

Quantitative data about kindergarten readiness and third grade literacy levels made people aware that many children were not meeting the standards for school success and set the stage for the literacy campaign.

## Finding 2

Quantitative data such as literacy rates brought awareness to ongoing issues within a community, however data alone did not infer solutions without additional consultation with parents, teachers, and early childhood support providers.

## Finding 3

Solutions were informed by interviews with parents and educators who could speak directly to experiences of inequity including socioeconomic disparities and the need for culturally informed strategies.

## Finding 4

Parents, educators, and early childhood support providers face complex barriers to ensure that children can succeed in school.

## Finding 5

Strategies were based on interview findings and paired with policy changes and tangible solutions tailored to the needs of the community.

## Finding 6

DNATL literacy champions experienced an outpouring of support from the broader community, which mobilized around the issue of literacy and supported efforts in a variety of ways.

## Finding 7

A cohesive strategy that aligned parents/care providers, preschool, kindergarten, and first-third grade teachers was imperative to ensure that all children could read by third grade.

## Finding 8

Professional development for preschool teachers allowed them to shift from seeing themselves as babysitters to seeing themselves as part of a continuum of educators.

## Finding 9

Changing program evaluation tools meant previous data collections were no longer relevant. The campaign needs to revisit its data and monitoring activities, and align them with current tools and program goals.

# DISCUSSION

## Finding 1: Quantitative data about kindergarten readiness and third grade literacy levels made people aware that many children were not meeting the standards for school success and set the stage for the literacy campaign.

### 3Read23 Campaign

The School Systems Implementation Team (SSIT) was formed in 2009, and initially focused on challenges to college and career paths. The team membership included high-powered, knowledgeable community leaders, including the Superintendent and Deputy School Superintendent of Del Norte County Unified School District (DNUSD), business leaders, a member of the county's Board of Supervisors, and a leader of the early childhood education system.

The DNATL BHC Initiative brought the California Center for Rural Policy (CCRP) in in 2010 to conduct research and gather secondary quantitative data around the health status of DNATL's community members. The Community Wellness Vital Signs report, prepared by CCRP in 2011, recommended a set of 20 core community wellness indicators. School readiness was one of the 20 core community wellness indicators.

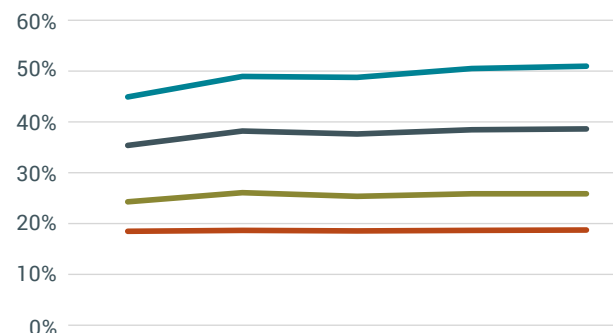
The Del Norte Unified School District shared data in 2011 that showed that 66% of children entering kindergarten did not have the skills they needed to succeed and by third grade 50% of children could not read at grade level. The data revealed that the majority of DNATL children were not accessing quality child care or preschool and were not meeting the third-grade literacy standards. The importance of third grade reading as an intervention point became even more apparent to the SSIT as they addressed challenges faced by youth in high school. According to one member of the DNATL BHC Literacy Initiative, "From preschool to third grade children learn to read, from 4th grade on children read to learn."

Literacy rates are obtained from comprehensive exams that students take each year. According to the Common Core State Standard Initiative, "The skills and knowledge captured in the English Language Arts (ELA) standards are designed to prepare students for life outside the classroom. They include critical-thinking skills and the ability to closely and attentively read texts in a way that will help them understand and enjoy complex works of literature. Students will learn to use cogent reasoning and evidence collection skills that are essential for success in college, career, and life. The standards also lay out a vision of what it means to be a literate person who is prepared for success in the 21st century."

According to the California Department of Education, a disproportionately low percentage of DNATL students were meeting or exceeding grade-level ELA standards. Figure 1 below demonstrates the percentage of all DNATL students and 3rd graders meeting the grade-level ELA standard in comparison to the state of California.

**Figure 1 - 3rd Grade ELA Scores for California and Del Norte**

Percent of Students Meeting/Exceeding the Grade-Level Standard English Language Arts



	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
CA 3rd Grades	38%	42%	44%	48%	49%
CA All Grades	44%	48%	49%	50%	51%
Del Norte 3rd Graders	23%	31%	28%	30%	29%
Del Norte All Grades	33%	35%	34%	35%	36%

Source: California Department of Education



## **Finding 2: Quantitative data such as literacy rates brought awareness to ongoing issues within a community, however data alone did not infer solutions without additional consultation with parents, teachers, and early childhood support providers.**

Early, well-intentioned efforts such as tutors for 3rd graders were implemented, but after two years no measurable improvements were observed. As one community leader noted, “It was clear that tutoring, although a nice tool, isn’t going to solve the issue, especially when you realize that 50 percent of third graders were not reading at a third-grade level.” Another community leader acknowledged,



***We weren’t getting to the root of the problem. We really didn’t understand what these kids and families were going through at home, and what the true barriers were.”***



In 2015, with the help of human centered design experts from ThinkPlace (international consulting organization), the SSIT began structuring the next phase of the DNATL BHC Literacy Initiative. The SSIT first considered what success would look like for the children born in 2014-2015. They set a specific goal for the community, families, and education system to share for this cohort of children:

**100%** of third graders in Del Norte and Tribal Lands would be reading at a third-grade level by 2023.

They called the campaign “3Read23,” to reflect the goal that all children entering third grade in 2023 would be reading at grade level.

The literacy campaign had a simple goal: it was not going to be acceptable for any child to fail. School and community leaders felt they had limited insight into the tangible and intangible factors that affect a child’s preparedness before they enter the school system at the beginning of the campaign.

No one had an accurate idea of why literacy scores were low or why children were not school ready by kindergarten. As one community stakeholder indicated, “Teachers and parents often blamed each other for the startling statistics that represented their children, students, and community.”

The SSIT began to plot out the project by framing an intent statement in late 2015. An intent statement is an actionable sentence to guide a project.

### **DNATL BHC Literacy Initiative Intent Statement**

To gain deep insights into the complexities of factors impacting young people’s learning outside of school (both before they start school [Pre-K] and during the first three years of school) to identify the tangible factors that enable and inhibit children’s capacity to attain literacy and, therefore, where the tangible levers of change lie.

DNATL BHC Literacy Initiative participants wanted a deeper understanding of the day-to-day experiences of families and teachers. They believed the knowledge gained would help inform strategies that could lead to lasting change.

A Core Design Team was formed to help carry out the intent that included community experts drawn from the local education and early childhood systems. The Core Design Team included leaders from First 5 Del Norte, Del Norte Unified School District, Del Norte Child Care Council, Howonquet Head Start, and the Family Resource Center of the Redwoods. All of these local partners received training in the research approach and were partnered with experienced human centered design specialists.

### **Finding 3: Solutions were informed by interviews with parents and educators who could speak directly to experiences of inequity including socioeconomic disparities and the need for culturally informed strategies.**

#### **The Empathy Research Process**

Community-based research and qualitative data gathered through empathy interviews brought awareness to the barriers that parents, educators, and early childhood support providers experienced while working to ensure that 1) children are ready for kindergarten and 2) children meet the third grade literacy requirements.

Empathy interviews were the core of the human centered design approach employed by the DNATL BHC Literacy Initiative. Empathy interviews are a qualitative research method used to investigate the root causes of current conditions. Empathy-based research methodology is often utilized in applied sociological or anthropological projects. According to ThinkPlace, “The focus of empathy research methods is listening to understand, which involves deferring any opinions or judgements, listening to someone’s whole story, and taking the time to understand both the story and context that they bring to the surface, but also their thoughts and feelings below the surface. From these rich and deep insights, a vivid picture can be developed that articulates the lived experience for the person being interviewed.”



*2016 Empathy Research Finding Review - Source 3Read23*

The Core Design Team interviewed 27 parents and 11 educators in January of 2016. The Core Design Team applied essential research field methods to gain the consent and trust of participants. Interviews were held in places where participants felt most comfortable, such as classrooms or in the homes of the participants. Interviewees were able to give the interviewer a spatial tour while describing their daily routines and the barriers they were experiencing during the interview process.

The range of parents engaged in the interviews was diverse, coming from a wide variety of incomes, neighborhoods, education levels, ethnic backgrounds, and marital status. The pool of educators invited to participate spanned the early education continuum, from family day care providers, preschool teachers, Head Start instructors, kindergarten teachers, and a range of grade level teachers.

#### **Findings from the 2016 Empathy Research Process**

The findings from the empathy interviews produced insights that made the literacy data more meaningful and emphasized that there was not one simple solution. In other words, the empathy research findings highlighted the need for all parties; families, teachers, the education system, and the entire community to be involved. In addition, the empathy research findings paved the way for conversations about race and equity – topics that had previously been considered unmentionable. As one community leader noted, “The process increased an understanding that the path to equity is through addressing the generational trauma many residents have experienced.”

These insights revealed similarities in the experiences of parents and educators alike. Everyone wanted children to succeed and thrive in school, but there was a misunderstanding and a communication gap between parents and teachers. Both shared false perceptions about the other, such as “some parents don’t care” and “that teacher hates my kid.” Most significantly, both parents and teachers spoke of feeling disconnected from necessary resources and felt overwhelmed by the work of meeting the needs of the children in their lives; being good

parents and good teachers in addition to juggling all of their other responsibilities. They shared the same feeling of being ill-equipped to adequately support and help children learn. In addition, there was a lack of clarity about what it means to be “kindergarten ready.”

That was across the board - teachers knew what it meant, but were not necessarily talking across the preschool to kindergarten bridge to seamlessly transition kids from one system to the other. Preschool teachers and kindergarten teachers were not communicating with each other and had different perspectives on what it meant to be “kinder-ready.” There was also a disconnect between

educators and parents.

“There was no connection between K and Pre-K. Now they can’t live without each other.” -Core Design Team Member

The empathy interviews revealed that parents and teachers wanted to be in partnership with one another. Both spoke of wanting a “two-way” relationship but not all shared the same understanding of what is needed or what the priorities should be.

Common themes derived from the empathy interviews from parents and educators are below.

## Educators

Teachers talked about the challenges of classroom management when children have different needs and different levels of preparedness for classroom work. Some teachers indicated they need access and time to engage in more professional development.

**One educator mentioned,**

“I do not feel equipped to handle the wide range of behaviors, trauma, and special needs children are displaying in my classroom.”

**Another teacher noted,**

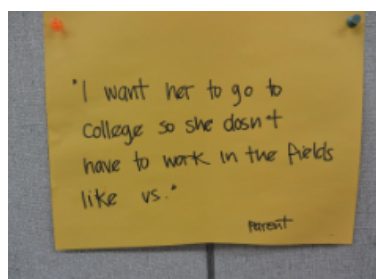
“I am overwhelmed by everything I need to provide for my students throughout the work day. I don’t just teach, I have planning and paperwork as well as looking out for the children. I have to spend a lot of my own time, money, and resources to meet my students’ needs and the many requirements of the school district and state.”

Teachers affirmed that access to quality preschool was important for being kindergarten ready. They

could see dramatic differences among their students who had attended preschool and those who did not. Preschool not only provides early learning experiences, but it allows for early identification of learning needs and opportunities for intervention.

**One teacher observed,**

“I have learned early assessment and intervention is vital.”



Insights from preschool and kindergarten teachers reflected a disconnect between the two as to what is expected of preschoolers

entering kindergarten. Preschool teachers believed they needed to focus on academic skills, while kindergarten teachers wanted children to have the social and emotional skills that would prepare them to sit still for learning and play well together. The perspectives from the diverse group of parents interviewed indicated that a positive educational experience means different things for different families.

## Parents

The Core Design Team created five broad categories representing a spectrum from “directed to drowning” to demonstrate the common experiences of diverse families in DNATL. The purpose of creating the five broad categories was to synthesize and analyze the data from the empathy interviews with parents and to communicate that families in DNATL are distributed across, and move among the five broad categories ranging from “directed to drowning” at any given time. The spectrum indicates that families are not permanently stuck in one category, but rather it is possible for families to evolve from one end of the spectrum to another. It was also noted that many families were just one paycheck away from struggling to drowning.

Below are the five categories created by the Core Design Team:

1

**Directed:** The families considered to be directed knew the importance of education, could advocate for their children, and knew how to work around the system to fill gaps to help their children succeed.

2

**Practical:** Practical refers to caregivers/families that knew how the system worked and knew how to keep their children safe.

3

**Getting By:** Families who valued education, but were time poor and not confident about how to support their children or engage with the school.

4

**Struggling:** Families who themselves had struggled in school and were distrustful of schools, yet wanted their children to have a different experience with school but did not know how to make it happen.

5

**Drowning:** Those families who were “drowning” were generally overwhelmed by trauma, mental illness, and drugs and alcohol that likely contributed to their lack of engagement.

The categories offered a way for community members outside of the Core Design Team to understand the different experiences of parents in DNATL.

**Finding 4: Parents, educators, and early childhood support providers face complex barriers to ensure that children can succeed in school.**

**The Literacy Symposium**

The DNATL BHC Literacy Initiative held a Literacy Symposium in June of 2016 where they shared their key insights with nearly 200 community members. Those in attendance included business owners, educators, childcare providers, education administrators, parents, and community leaders. The audience heard the insights from the empathy interviews, and helped the DNATL BHC Literacy Initiative brainstorm future aspirations for the 3Read23 Campaign. The Literacy Symposium

marked the first time the community had come together in such large numbers to support literacy. Local government bodies, Tribal councils, school districts, and community partners all committed to the goals of the 3Read23 Campaign.

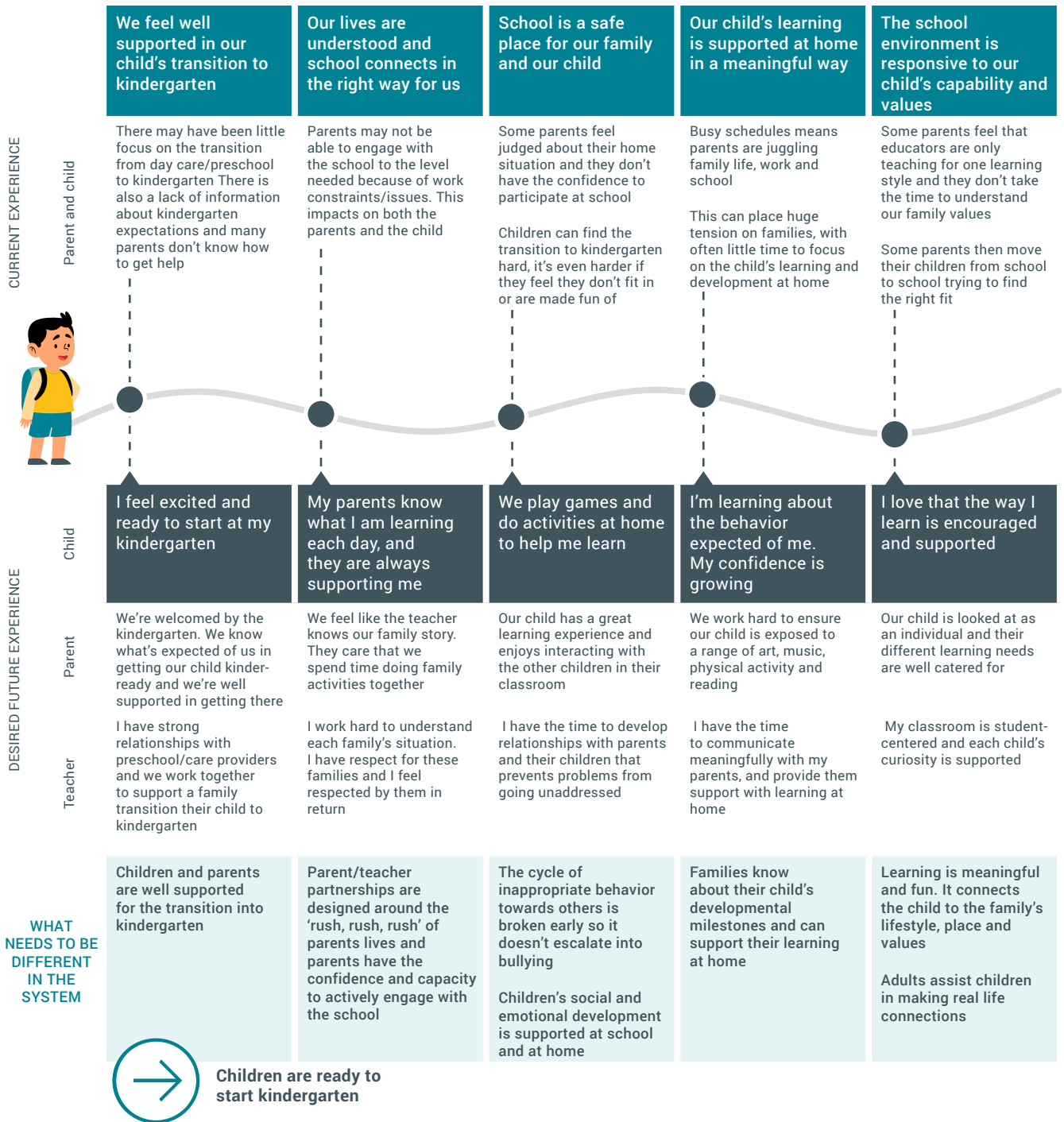
**Mapping Out Solutions – Walk Throughs**

The DNATL BHC Literacy Initiative presented the future experience map from July to November of 2016, (Figure 2) to the community during a series of interactive presentations designed to gather more insight from community members, and ensure that they had truly heard and understood what the community was saying in the empathy interview process.



*2016 Literacy Symposium - Source 3Read23*

# Figure 2 - Future Experience Pathway



## Finding 5: Strategies were based on interview findings and paired with policy changes and tangible solutions tailored to the needs of the community.

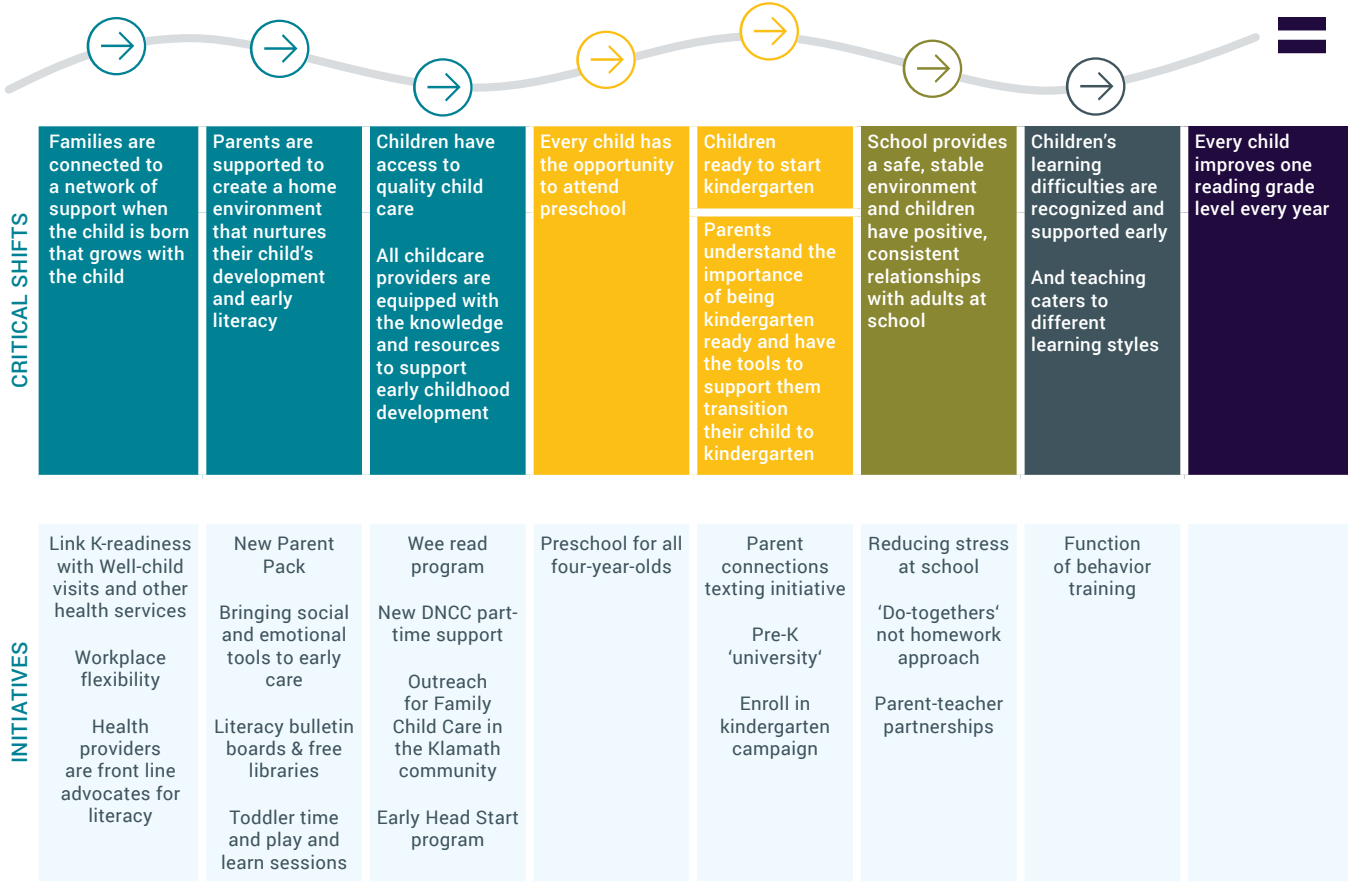
The SSIT no longer exists, though the SSIT did not end all at once. Members of the SSIT dropped out due to differences in personalities or changes in careers. Some of the members retired or moved out of the area. Even after the institutional support of the SSIT had waned, the team organized to ensure that the DNATL BHC Literacy Initiative work would continue. Members of the Core Design Team utilized the data from the empathy research and their experience from the Literacy Symposium to implement tangible projects in creating a healthier school environment and increasing kindergarten readiness.

The Literacy Symposium generated a set of ideas on how to improve kindergarten readiness and increase literacy rates among third graders. They designed a set of projects and organized leadership

to bring those projects to fruition and created a community blueprint for change in December of 2016. The activities implemented since the Literacy Symposium are numerous and wide-ranging. Many can be grouped into strategies that:

- 01 Increase access to quality early childhood education.
- 02 Offer parenting resources and educational opportunities for parents.
- 03 Reduce family stress.
- 04 Strengthen working relationships and information sharing between preschool and kindergarten teachers.
- 05 Increase support for teachers.

**Figure 3 - Initiative Alignment**



## 3Read23 Campaign Projects

Below are some of the projects implemented by the community members that make up the BHC 3Read23 Campaign.

### **Improved Access to Preschool Early Education**

The Literacy Symposium and the smaller group presentations taught child care providers that waitlists were not a reflection of the popularity of their program, but rather a reflection of a lack of access to preschool early education.

As a result of the Literacy Symposium and presentations, multiple preschool programs, private and public, expanded access to families by adding full classrooms, extending half day programs to whole days, and/or expanding income eligibility.

As a result of the 3Read23 Campaign, quality child care improved from 33% to 66% and kindergarten readiness improved from 33% to 44% by the end of 2016.

### **UnHomework Initiative**

All elementary schools in DNATL have adopted and revised homework policies for children in kindergarten through second grade designed to reduce family stress and encourage experiential learning rather than compliance with worksheets.

The UnHomework Initiative calls for homework policies to eliminate lengthy homework assignments requiring time commitments from parents and to include experiential activities that encourage quality family time. Teachers and parents reported that the new approach succeeded in reducing stress and allowing for more family connections around learning.

### **Dolly Parton's Imagination Library**

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is an international program dedicated to inspiring a love of reading by gifting books free of charge to children from birth to age five. The 3Read23 Campaign is a participant in the program.

The number of children receiving books changes as children age out, but as of the writing of this report, there are 709 children receiving books. This represents half of the eligible population.

### **Breakfast After the Bell**

Members of the Core Design Team learned from teachers that part of the reason students were struggling with learning to read was that they were coming to school hungry. Prior to the DNATL BHC Literacy Initiative, the free breakfast program at schools had low participation rates. Schools provided free breakfast before class, but students in need of breakfast often didn't arrive early enough to receive free breakfast.

Two DNATL BHC Initiative programs (Literacy and Food) worked together to initiate the Breakfast After the Bell Program to decrease food insecurity and increase student performance. Breakfast After the Bell is a nationally recognized program that has been shown to be one of the most effective ways to boost breakfast participation in schools. Teachers are able to provide breakfast foods during the beginning of class, after the bell has rung. The Del Norte Unified School District was able to pilot the program in two classrooms at Mary Peacock Elementary in 2018.

The Breakfast After the Bell Program led to a huge increase (From 20-23% to 80-90%) in students eating breakfast. Teachers who participated in this program mentioned that they observed that their students are now calmer with fewer nurse visits and anxiety about when they would get snacks. The program has been considered so successful that in 2021 it was adopted by all elementary schools in the Del Norte Unified School District.



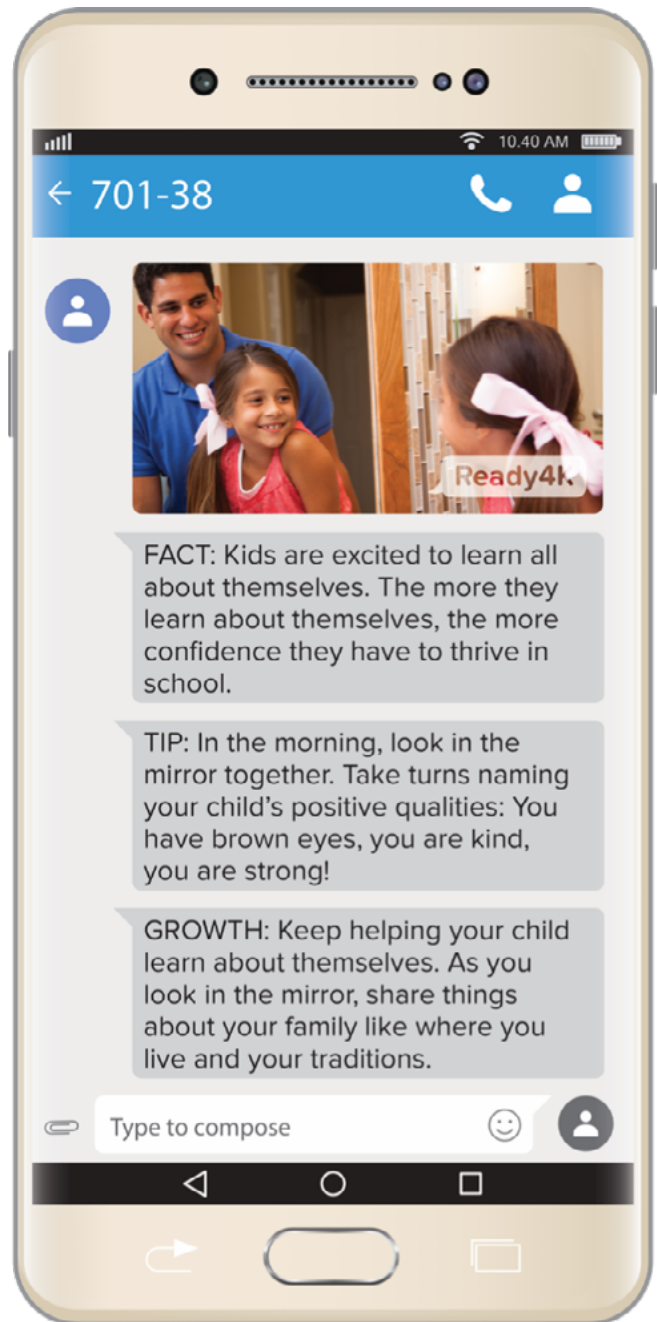
## Texting 0-5 Program

Parent Connections is a cell phone app texting program piloted by First 5 Del Norte. The texting program is for people who are expecting to become parents and parents who have children between the ages of zero to five years old.

The Parent Connections texting helps parents to be more connected to the resources they need to help their children get ready for kindergarten. It has been adapted specifically for the Del Norte population after it was initially piloted with 24 families.

The adaptation was completed with parents and community service providers and focuses on parental mental health, self care, and connection to local resources and services. Parents receive three texts a week that provide tips and activities to support their child's development and their own self-care. This application is supported by county Mental Health Services innovation funding. Figure 4 shows an example of what a text message to parents looks like.

Figure 4 - Parent Connections Text Example



**Finding 6: DNATL literacy champions experienced an outpouring of support from the broader community, which mobilized around the issue of literacy and supported efforts in a variety of ways.**

# 3 READ '23 SUPPORTER

Partnering with Building Healthy Communities, Literacy Initiative

When parents started to see the importance of their role in teaching their child to read, the initiative began to gain traction. Parents realized that it was a shared responsibility between parents and teachers to teach their children to read, and they understood that if their child was not reading by third grade it could negatively impact their child's education - and by extension their future going forward. Parents also learned that it was easier than they realized to help their children learn to read, and that reading to their kids for 10 minutes had a big impact on their child's ability to read. From there it spread to other people like grandparents and siblings to read to children.

The community adopted a more holistic approach to early literacy that included the family, the schools, and the community at large and they embraced the idea that literacy is anywhere, and literacy is everywhere. Books began to show up in the grocery stores, the bowling alley, and in restaurants. Healthcare providers were on board, and gave children books when they came in for health child visits.

An idea that motivated educators and parents to support the initiative was the idea that many children identified being an astronaut as a career choice, but they often couldn't read, or read well. The realization that collectively they were failing their children. The question became, "How can we build astronauts if we aren't even teaching our children to read Goodnight Moon."

Another important factor that motivated educators,

parents and community members was "Marcus." Marcus was an infant in 2016 when the empathy interviews were taking place, and interviewers went to his home. One of them captured the photo below of Marcus crawling on a large sheet of paper covered with sticky notes related to the initiative and interviews. Marcus became the face of the initiative with that photo, and he is in the cohort of children who will be in third grade in 2023. According to one of the core design team members, "The problem is owned all the way to the ground because it has a face [ Marcus]."



Marcus - photo courtesy of the 3Read23 team

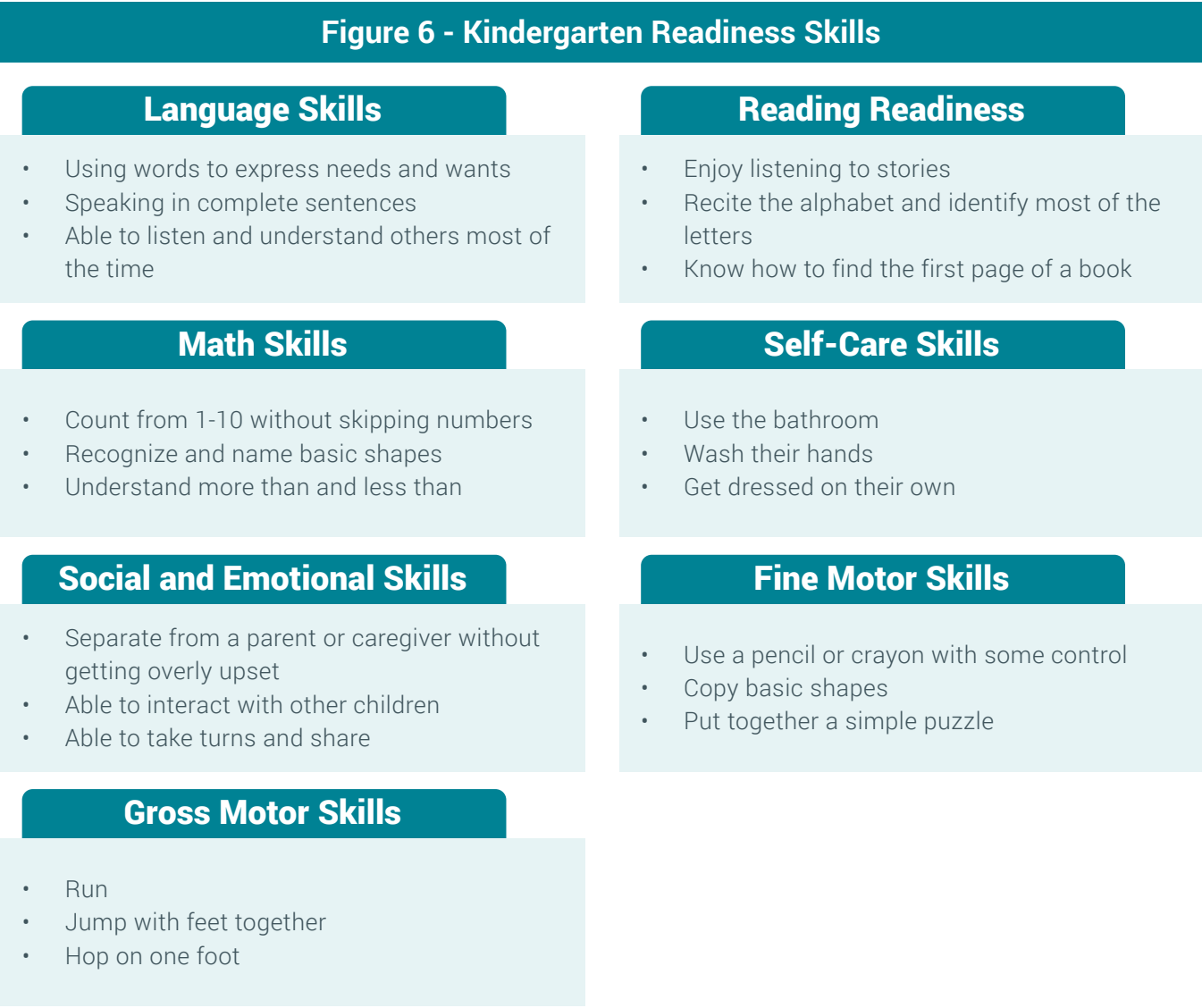


The idea of all children being able to read at grade level by the third grade was initially a dream held by the SSIT, and then gained momentum as a result of the trifecta of the school district, educators and parents owning the vision.

**Finding 7: A cohesive strategy that aligned parents/care providers, preschool, kindergarten, and first-third grade teachers was imperative to ensure that all children could read by third grade.**

A cohesive strategy to ensure that children are reading at grade level by third grade begins with preschool teachers and parents understanding what it means for children to be kindergarten ready. One of the subgoals of the 3Read23 Campaign is that children are “kindergarten ready.” Being developmentally ready for kindergarten is the pathway to literacy success, and it truly affects their success in school if they aren’t prepared for kindergarten.

Figure 6 shows many of the skills that constitute kindergarten readiness, according to educators and education researchers. While few children enter kindergarten having mastered all these skills, those who are prepared for academic success will be at least developing most of these skills.



Fortunately, the programs and supports that the DNATL BHC Initiative have implemented appear to be making a difference. Prior to the 3Read23 Initiative, only 33% of children entering kindergarten were kindergarten ready as measured by First 5 Del Norte using the Kindergarten Readiness Tool. By 2020 that number had increased to 46%.

## Finding 8: Professional development for preschool teachers allowed them to shift from seeing themselves as babysitters to seeing themselves as part of a continuum of educators.

According to the qualitative research conducted by the Core Design Team and SSIT members, preschool teachers in DNATL have typically seen themselves as babysitters rather than educators. The 3Read23 Campaign work has already made a significant difference in supporting preschool teachers to understand and value their critical importance in education.

This progress is due in large part to the early childhood education (ECE) certificate program now in place at College of the Redwoods. In order to receive the certificate of achievement in ECE participants must:

- Demonstrate knowledge of a variety of types of programs for young children and the history of early care and education in the United States.
- Articulate an understanding of typical and atypical development of young children from birth through age eight.
- Develop strategies that promote partnerships between programs, teachers, families, and their communities.
- Identify the components of environments and curriculums which support positive development and learning through play for all children.
- Demonstrate ethical standards and professional behaviors that deepen understanding, knowledge, and commitment to the Early Childhood Education profession.

Additional professional development opportunities have been made available by Quality Counts Del Norte (QCDN), a program of Quality Counts California to preschool teachers that enable them to increase their skills and knowledge. Quality Counts Del Norte provides support and training to early childhood caregivers and educators. Through funding from First 5 California, QCDN offers resources and training opportunities related to the statewide Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). The goal is to raise the quality of all early childhood programs, whether that is a center-based preschool, a family child care provider, or a playgroup at a Family Resource Center (FRC).

A compelling example of the progress being made can be seen in the results of one intervention made by the DNATL BHC Core Design Team. In the process of conducting on-site interviews with childcare providers, the team visited one of the most popular providers in the area. While the provider's facility had an extensive video library and a large-screen TV for children to watch, there were no books seen. After the team discussed with the provider just how important early childhood literacy is for children's academic success—and the importance of her role as an educator—she designated a reading area and established a library of books for the children in her care.

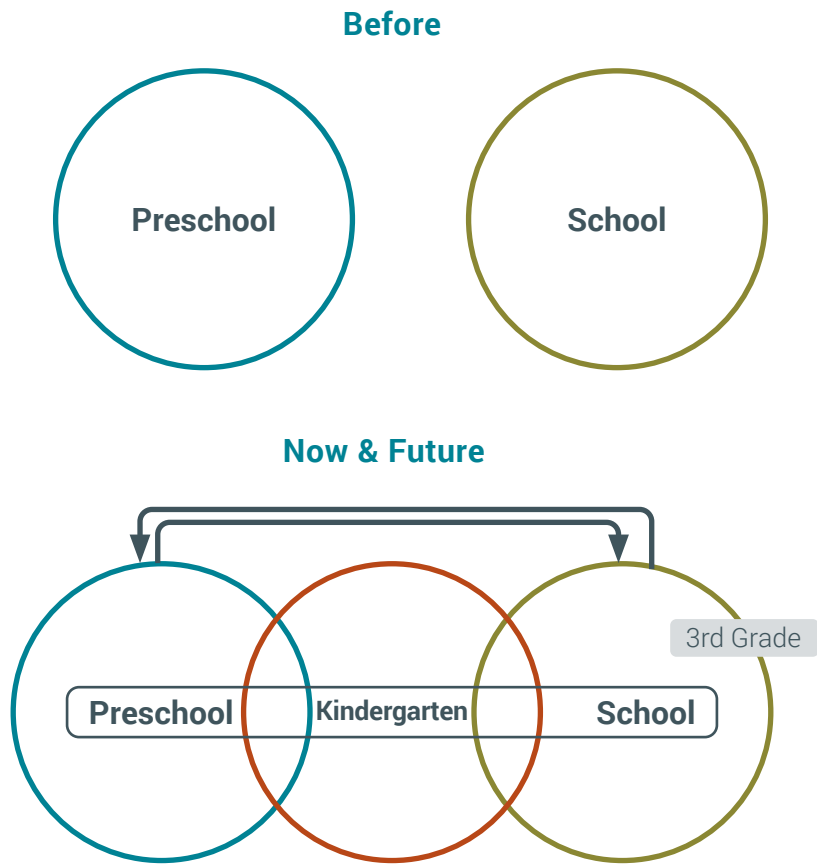
“

***This has completely changed the nature of the way in-home childcare providers view their role. They now see themselves as educators, not babysitters.*** - Core Design Team Member

”

This shift in perspective by ECE providers is essential to help children learn to read and enjoy books from preschool age, rather than waiting until they start kindergarten.

Figure 7 - A Wholistic Journey with Community, Educators, and Parents



**Finding 9: Changing program evaluation tools meant previous data collections were no longer relevant. The campaign needs to revisit its data and monitoring activities, and align them with current tools and program goals.**

Although the DNATL BHC Literacy Initiative has been successfully tracking their progress with access to early education and kindergarten readiness, tracking progress toward third grade literacy has been challenging, in part because the tools used to

measure literacy have been changing. This has led to skewed data.

There is a need for one consistent, equitable way to measure literacy rates among third graders. Measuring progress helps identify projects that can bring about the changes being sought, and to establish the leadership and programs to deliver those projects. As one DNATL BHC Literacy Initiative member states, “we do not know if we are reaching our goal of 100% of third graders reading at third grade level...we need to know as soon as possible.”




# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Over the course of the project, BHC DNATL’s Literacy initiatives galvanized a community and achieved many important goals as a result.

The potential for data to inspire action was a key part of the DNATL BHC literacy work. Once community members were aware of how the children in their community were performing on key literacy metrics, and understood the relationship between literacy and wellness outcomes later in life, they were motivated to do all they could to fix the issue. It stands to reason that keeping up with evaluation and tracking key performance indicators will ensure that collaborators and supporters of goals like 3Read23 have the tools they need to stay motivated, innovate when needed, and cross the finish line. In order to truly see the benefits and success of this initiative and to see the impact on children known as the “Marcus cohort,” it is important to continue the work through 2023 to see the impact of the work on children entering third grade that year.

Numbers may have provided the motivation, but it was centering the human stories (like Marcus’s) and working to really understand the needs of kids, parents, educators, and all members of the literacy ecosystem that inspired transformative

strategies and created positive change. To build on the impressive achievements of this community-wide effort, DNATL BHC stakeholders emphasize the following priorities:

-  Maintaining transparency by keeping community members and partners informed of the initiative’s process as well as progress.
-  Continue to cultivate and develop consistent existing resources for Home-based child care providers.
-  Continue to keep civic engagement authentic and build trust among families, educators, and child care providers.

The experience of the 3Read23 campaign and other literacy efforts highlight how working across sectors and focus areas, for example addressing the school breakfast issue, unlocks transformational potential and creates new opportunities in “stuck” systems. This theme is explored in other case studies in this series.

## APPENDIX

# Tangible Wins and Benefits

2016

- Del Norte Unified School District expands the income eligibility to establish 10 state-preschool slots countywide for families just over the income threshold. The expansion is funded utilizing LCAP dollars.
- Local government bodies, tribal councils, school district and community partners each vote to join the 3Read23 Campaign to ensure all third graders are reading at grade level by the year 2023.
- As a result of the 3Read23 Campaign, quality childcare improves from 33 percent of providers to 66 percent and kindergarten readiness improves from 33 percent in 2015 to 44 percent in 2016.
- Del Norte Unified Schools adopts an “un-homework” policy, allowing schools and teachers the flexibility to design family-centered options to reduce stress for students and improve student achievement.

2017

- The City of Crescent City allocates CDBG funds to support the 3Read23 Campaign. While the City was an early supporter of the collaborative community campaign, the City was spurred to invest by data on key indicators tracking success.

2018

- Breakfast after the Bell program is piloted in two classrooms at Mary Peacock Elementary School to increase student access to healthy foods.
- First 5 Del Norte, on behalf of the Literacy Core Design Team, receives funding from Mental Health Services Act Innovation Fund to develop a local version of Ready4K, a parent support/school readiness texting program.

2019

- Del Norte Child Care Council leverages a small grant to create three new positions to increase access for families to high quality early child care which will be sustained with state funds.
- Head Start programs and other early education providers align professional development days with the Del Norte Unified School District so all providers can benefit from trainings.

2020

- With school closures for COVID-19 prevention, Del Norte Unified School District enrolls all Pre-K to fourth grade students in Ready4K, a parent support/child development texting program.