

# Building Healthy Communities

Literacy Case Study

Small Steps Toward Big Dreams



# What were we solving for?

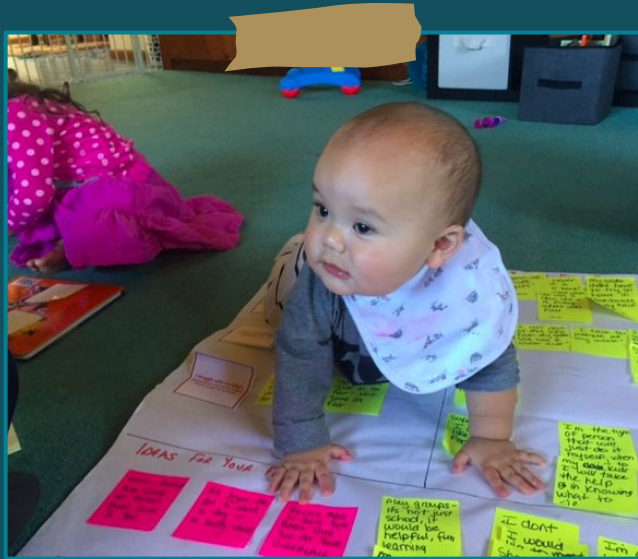


In 2011, about 66% of children entering kindergarten in Del Norte did not have the skills they needed to succeed, and by third grade 50% could not read at the appropriate grade level.

The School System Implementation Team tried a variety of strategies to improve kindergarten readiness and third grade reading scores, but the outcomes weren't improving.

Schools knew that data wasn't making headway, but didn't realize parent education was so low about the importance of literacy - they realized they needed to reach and educate parents, as well as getting books into the hands of families and children.

# Our Overarching Goal



“ By 2023, every child in Del Norte & Tribal Lands will be able to read at grade-level by third grade. ”

# Research 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.

# Research Findings

## 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.

## **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.

**The data also revealed that the majority of Del Norte and Tribal Lands (DNATL) children were not accessing quality child care or preschool and were not meeting the third-grade literacy standards.**

**“From preschool to third grade children learn to read, and from 4th grade on children read to learn.”**

# 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.”

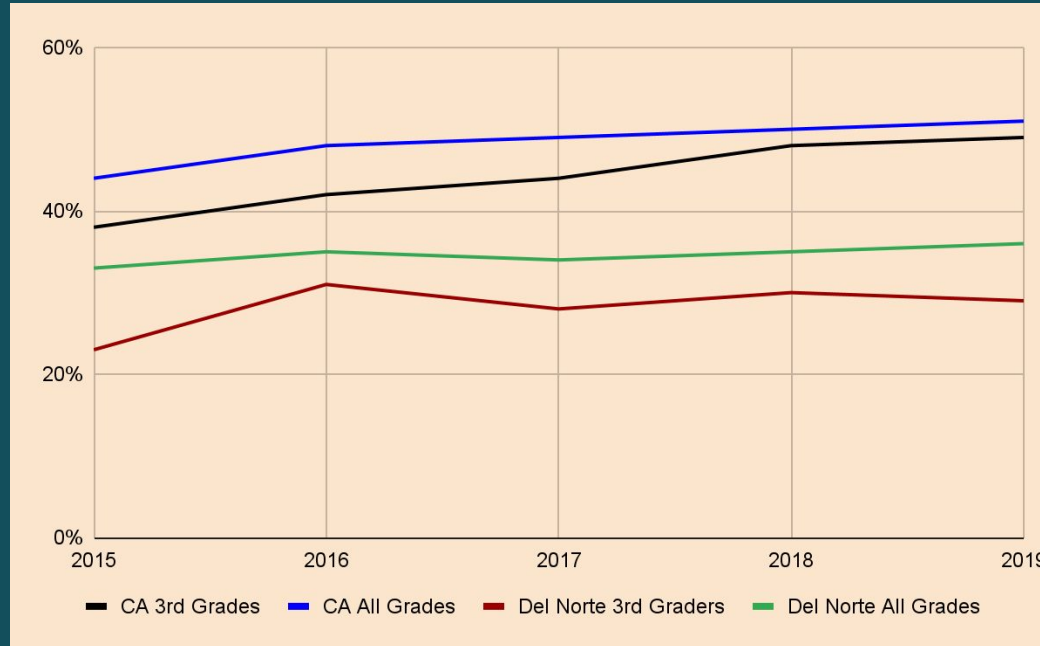
According to the California Department of Education, a disproportionately low percentage of DNATL students were meeting or exceeding grade-level ELA standards.

# 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%



# Percent of Students Meeting/Exceeding the grade-level Standard English Language Arts



“

*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.*  
**-a community leader**

”

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No one had an accurate idea of why literacy scores were low or why children were not school ready by kindergarten

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.

“

*“Teachers and parents often blamed each other for the startling statistics that represented their children, students, and community.”*  
**-a community stakeholder**

”

## 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.

The literacy campaign had a simple goal:

**It was not going to be acceptable for any child to fail.**

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

“...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.”

-a community leader

### **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.

**Community-based research and qualitative data was gathered through empathy interviews with 27 parents and 11 educators. The 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**

**2**

**Children meet the third grade literacy requirements**

# Findings from the 2016 Empathy Research Process

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The findings emphasized that there was not one simple solution, and highlighted the need for all parties; families, teachers, the education system, and the entire community to be involved.

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.

*“That teacher hates my kid.”*

*“Some parents don’t care.”*

# Common Themes From Empathy Interviews From Educators

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

**-An educator**

”

- The challenges of classroom management when children have different needs and different levels of preparedness for classroom work.
- Needing access and time to engage in more professional development.
- Access to quality preschool was important for being kindergarten ready. Teachers could see dramatic differences among their students who had attended preschool and those who did not.
- There was a disconnect between what the two educators expected of preschoolers entering kindergarten.
  - Preschool teachers believed they needed to focus on academic skills.
  - Kindergarten teachers wanted children to have the social and emotional skills that would prepare them to sit still for learning and play well together.

# Common Themes From Empathy Interviews From Parents



The Core Design Team created five broad categories representing a spectrum from “direct to drowning” to demonstrate the common experiences of diverse families in DNATL. 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.

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

# Common Themes From Empathy Interviews From Parents

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## The Five Categories

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.

It was noted that many families were just one paycheck away from struggling to drowning.



#### **Finding 4**

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

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## Future Experience Map

Future Experience Pathway	Current Experience <u>Parent &amp; Child</u>	Desired Future Experience			What Needs to Be Different In The System
		<u>Child</u>	<u>Parent</u>	<u>Teacher</u>	
We feel well supported in our child's transition to kindergarten.	There may have been little focus on the transition from day care/ preschool to kindergarten. There is also a lack of information about kindergarten expectations and many parents don't know how to get help.	I feel excited and ready to start at my kindergarten.	We're welcomed by the kindergarten. We know what's expected of us in getting our child kinder-ready and we're well supported in getting there.	I have strong relationships with preschool/care providers and we work together to support a family transition their child to kindergarten.	Children and parents are well supported for the transition into kindergarten
Our lives are understood and school connects in the right way for us.	Parents may not be able to engage with the school to the level needed because of work constraints/ issues. This impacts on both the parents and the child.	My parents know what I am learning each day, and they are always supporting me.	We feel like the teacher knows our family story. They care that we spend time doing family activities together.	I work hard to understand each family's situation. I have respect for these families and I feel respected by them in return.	Parent/teacher partnerships are designed around the 'rush, rush, rush' of parents lives and parents have the confidence and capacity to actively engage with the school.

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School is a safe place for our family and our child.	<p>Some parents feel judged about their home situation and they don't have the confidence to participate at school.</p> <p>Children can find the transition to kindergarten hard, it's even harder if they feel they don't fit in or are made fun of.</p>	We play games and do activities at home to help me learn.	Our child has a great learning experience and enjoys interacting with the other children in their classroom.	I have the time to develop relationships with parents and their children that prevents problems from going unaddressed.	The cycle of inappropriate behavior toward others is broken early so it doesn't escalate into bullying. Children's social and emotional development is supported at school and at home.
Our child's learning is supported at home in a meaningful way.	<p>Busy schedules means parents are juggling family life, work, and school.</p> <p>This can place huge tension on families, with often little time to focus on the child's learning and development at home.</p>	<p>I'm learning about the behavior expected of me.</p> <p>My confidence is growing.</p>	We work hard to ensure our child is exposed to a range of art, music, physical activity, and reading.	I have the time to communicate meaningfully with my parents, and provide them support with learning at home.	Families know about their child's developmental milestones and can support their learning at home.
The school environment is responsive to our child's capability and values.	<p>Some parents feel that educators are only teaching for one learning style and they don't take the time to understand our family values.</p> <p>Some parents then move their children from school to school trying to find the right fit.</p>	I love that the way I learn is encouraged and supported.	Our child is looked at as an individual and their different learning needs are well catered for.	My classroom is student-centered and each child's curiosity is supported.	<p>Learning is meaningful and fun. It connects the child to the family's lifestyle, place, and values.</p> <p>Adults assist children in making real life connections.</p>

## Finding 5

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

Members of the Core Design Team utilized 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 ideas on how to improve kindergarten readiness and increase literacy rates among third graders. The activities implemented are numerous and wide-ranging.

### Groups of Strategies

1

Increase access to quality early childhood education.

2

Offer parenting resources and educational opportunities for parents.

3

Reduce family stress.

4

Strengthen working relationships and information sharing between preschool and kindergarten teachers.

5

Increase support for teachers.

# Initiative Alignments

## Critical Shifts

**Families are connected to a network of support when the child is born that grows with the child**

**Parents are supported to create a home environment that nurtures their child's development and early literacy**

- **Children have access to quality child care**
- **All childcare providers are equipped with the knowledge and resources to support early childhood development**

## Initiatives

- Link K-readiness with Well-child visits and other health services
- Workplace flexibility
- Health providers are front line advocates for literacy

- New Parent Pack
- Bringing social and emotional tools to early care
- Literacy bulletin boards & free libraries
- Toddler time and play & learn sessions

- Wee read program
- New Del Norte Child Care Council part-time support
- Outreach for Family Child Care in the Klamath community
- Early Head Start program

# Initiative Alignments

## Critical Shifts

Every child has the opportunity to attend preschool

- Children ready to start kindergarten
- Parents understand the importance of being kindergarten ready and have the tools to support them transition their child to kindergarten

School provides a safe, stable environment and children have positive, consistent relationships with adults at school

- Children's learning difficulties are recognized and supported early
- And teaching caters to different learning styles

Every child improves one reading grade level every year

## Initiatives

Preschool for all four-year-olds

- Parent connections texting initiative
- Pre-K 'university'
- Enroll in kindergarten campaign

- Reducing stress at school
- 'Do-togethers' not homework approach
- Parent-teacher partnerships

Function of behavior training

# BHC 3Read23 Campaign Project

## Improved Access to Preschool Early Education

The Literacy Symposium and 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, 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 campaign,  
by the end of 2016:

Quality child care improved from

33%

to

66%

Kindergarten readiness improved

33%

to

44%

# BHC 3Read23 Campaign Project

## 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.**



# BHC 3Read23 Campaign Project

## Breakfast After the Bell

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 school.

Teachers are able to provide breakfast foods during the beginning of class, after the bell has rung.

**The program led to a huge increase (from 20-23% to 80-90%) in students eating breakfast.**

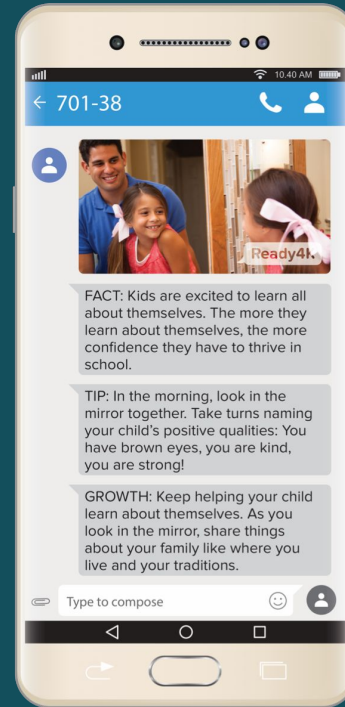
The program has been so successful that in 2021 it was adopted by all elementary schools in the Del Norte Unified School District.

# BHC 3Read23 Campaign Project

## Texting 0-5 Program

Parent connections is a cell phone app texting program providing tips and activities focusing on parental mental health, self-care, and connection to local resources and services. The goal is to help parents get their children ready for kindergarten.

The app is supported by county Mental Health Services innovation funding and was specifically adapted for the Del Norte population after it was initially piloted with 24 families.



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.



Parents realized that it was a shared responsibility between parents and teachers to teach their children to read and 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 reading to their kids for ten minutes greatly impacted their child's ability to read.



The community adopted a more holistic approach to early literacy and they embraced the idea that literacy is anywhere, and literacy is everywhere. Books began appearing in grocery stores, the bowling alley, restaurants, and in healthcare settings.

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.

They realized that collectively they were failing their children.



*“How can we build astronauts if we aren't even teaching our children to read Goodnight Moon?”*



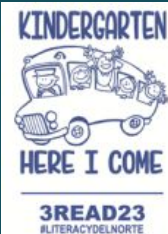
# Marcus



Marcus was an infant in 2016 when the empathy interviews were taking place. A photo of him crawling on the sheet of paper related to the initiative impressed the importance of ensuring that all third graders would meet their literacy requirements. He became the face of the initiative, and is in the cohort of children who will be in third grade in 2023.

*“...the problems is owned all the way to the ground because it has a face [Marcus].”*

**-a core design team member**



## 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.

According to educators and education researchers, there are many skills that constitute kindergarten readiness.

While few children enter kindergarten having mastered all these skills, those who are prepared for academic success will be at least developing most of them.

# Kindergarten Readiness Skills

## Language Skills

- Using words to express needs and wants
- Speaking in complete sentences
- Able to listen and understand others most of the time

## Reading Readiness

- Enjoy listening to stories
- Recite the alphabet and identify most of the letters
- Know how to find the first page of a book

## Math Skills

- Count from 1-10 without skipping numbers
- Recognize and name basic shapes
- Understand more than and less than

## Self-Care Skills

- Use the bathroom
- Wash their hands
- Get dressed on their own

## Social and Emotional Skills

- Separate from a parent or caregiver without getting overly upset
- Able to interact with other children
- Able to take turns and share

## Fine Motor Skills

- Use a pencil or crayon with some control
- Copy basic shapes
- Put together a simple puzzle

## Gross Motor Skills

- Run
- Jump with feet together
- Hop on one foot



Prior to the 3Read23 Initiative, 33% of children entering kindergarten were kindergarten ready.

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.

The 3Read23 Campaign has made a significant difference in supporting preschool teachers to understand and value their critical importance in education.

There are two programs that offer opportunities for preschool teachers to increase their skills and knowledge, while at the same time gaining a deeper understanding of their role as professionals on the educational pathway.

## Early Childhood Education Certificate Program

In order to receive the certificate of achievement, 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.

## Quality Counts Del Norte

Quality Counts Del Norte (QCDN) is a program of Quality Counts California.

Through funding from First 5 California, they also offer 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:

- Center-based preschools
- Family child care providers
- Playgroups at Family Resource Centers (FRC)



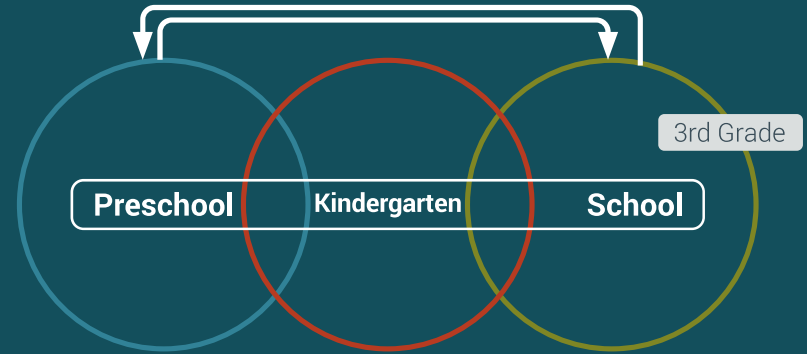


# The Holistic Journey with Community, Educators and Parents

Before



Now & Future



## Finding 9

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

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.

“

*We do not know if we are reaching our goal of 100% of third graders reading at a third grade level...we need to know as soon as possible.*

**-DNATL BHC Literacy Initiative member**

”

# Tangible Wins and Benefits

2016

- Del Norte Unified School District expands the income eligibility for state-preschool families just over the income threshold.
- Local government bodies, Tribal councils, school district and community partners join the 3Read23 Campaign.
- As a result of 3Read23, quality child care improves from 33 percent to 66 percent and kindergarten readiness improves from 33 percent to 44 percent.
- Del Norte Unified School District adopts an “un-homework” policy to reduce stress for students and improve student achievement.

2017

- The City of Crescent City allocates Community Development Block Grant funds to support the 3Read23 Campaign.

2018

- Breakfast After the Bell program is piloted in two classrooms to increase student access to healthy foods.
- First 5 Del Norte receives funding from the Mental Health Services Act Innovation Fund to develop a local version of Ready4K.

2019

- Del Norte Child Care Council creates three new positions to increase access 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

- Del Norte Unified School District enrolls all Pre-K to 4th grade students in Ready4K.