

# Partnering with Parents: Durham Literacy Organizations Share Strategies and Results

August 23, 2021

In celebration of national Grade-Level Reading week at the end of July, NCECF hosted a national webinar with Durham literacy partners to share their work to ensure that parents and caregivers are at the forefront when designing and implementing programs and improving systems.

Here's some highlights and you can watch the webinar [here](#).

**Don't Come to Us, We'll Come to You!** Caitlyn Bergmann, Book Bank Manager for [Book Harvest](#), explained the [Book Boxes](#) project (for children birth to middle school) modeled after the little libraries you might see around your neighborhood. The pandemic inspired this project since the public libraries and schools were closed and parents could not access books where they might usually do so. The eight locations of these oversized boxes were determined by parents and a slew of volunteers help keep the boxes filled.



Children selecting books from Book Boxes installed in public spaces in Durham, NC.

Book Boxes are on public property, so the project involved cooperation with local government. Another volunteer built these beautiful boxes and helped with installation. Since April 2021 more than 4,600 books have been distributed through Book Boxes. With overwhelming community support, Books Boxes will remain a part of Durham's landscape. Another four boxes are slated for installation this year

and six more next year. Book Harvest is consulting with parents about what's working and what could be improved as the initiative grows.

**Parents as Leaders in Durham's Early Childhood Action Plan (ECAP).** The County's ECAP was inspired by the [NC Early Childhood Action Plan](#) to take a holistic view of what children need to thrive. Cate Elander, the Early Childhood Coordinator for Durham County working out of the [Durham County Cooperative Extension](#) discussed how the action plan is rooted in equity and there is a commitment to take on root causes of challenges facing families. Creating the action plan has been centered around people who are facing disparities creating the solutions. As Cate explained, "powerful parent leadership" has shaped the action plan's 21 recommendations that are paired with strategies to create a warm, equitable, just and safe community for children and families.

Randy Trice, who has been a parent leader in creating the action plan, talked about the importance of the county creating space for putting action to the thoughts and ideas of parents and how this approach is not always how engagement works. As the Durham ECAP strategies are worked through, the process has evolved and the goal is for parents and those working directly with children to make up the majority of the steering committee providing oversight for putting the plan into action.