

Kindergarten Readiness Program Aims to Close Achievement Gap

By [Blake Hodge](#)

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A local program is helping low-income and at-risk children prepare for kindergarten.

66 children from low-income families or that were identified as needing additional support participated in a summer kindergarten readiness program from the Family Success Alliance to prepare those students for the start of kindergarten.

Dr. Michael Steiner is a pediatrician at the North Carolina Children's Hospital and serves as an adviser to the Family Success Alliance. He says data shows significant improvements in the assessment scores of children who participated in the first year of this program.

"This program is currently the entry point into this long pipeline," Steiner says. "We promise to continue developing programs that will build the pipeline, strengthen partnerships and make resources available to children and their families as they successfully move through their school years with early college and early career being the end goal of our work."

Sheldon Lanier is the Director of Equity Leadership in the Chapel Hill – Carrboro City School District, and he says students showed major growth in the short summer program.

“Overall, the students that were enrolled in the program moved from nine percent to 67 percent in terms of proficiency,” Lanier says. “When we’re talking about proficiency, we’re talking about leveling the playing field and having students ready to enter into kindergarten and actually, I don’t want to say compete, but basically be able to achieve on the same level as students who may have already gotten some of those resources.”

Lanier adds students at New Hope Elementary went from zero percent to 63 percent proficient, while students at Carrboro Elementary went from 33 to 61 percent proficient and participants at Frank Porter Graham showed the largest improvement from zero to 74 percent proficient.

Chapel Hill – Carrboro City Schools Assistant Superintendent Magda Parvey says programs like this will help close the achievement gap.

“The Kindergarten Readiness Program really aligns very nicely with the work we’re doing to help address the achievement gap,” Parvey says. “Specifically, in terms of pre-teaching and preparing students in advance of being in school. It aligns very much with our K-12 initiatives in terms of strategies that are evidence-based.

“We really appreciated the it-takes-a-village approach that the Family Success Alliance provided, and we were very honored to be a part of that.”

These three schools were chosen to participate because they are in the [two zones selected in late 2014](#) by the Family Success Alliance to focus efforts during the first year of the program’s existence.

Amber Wilson is the Assistant Principal at New Hope Elementary Schools. She says she has seen first-hand the impact this program has had on preparing students for kindergarten. She says a major step to ensuring students are ready begins with reaching their parents.

“To start out our program at New Hope, we also brought parents in and did an informational session, which we felt was really beneficial,” Wilson says. “And, more importantly, at the end of our program we brought our parents back to celebrate the success that we had during the program.

Wilson says every parent with a child in the program attended the end-of-session banquet.

“It was so sweet. The kids were all dressed up in their little dresses and stuff. And they were so excited to share with everybody what they had learned. And they felt good about themselves.”

Wilson adds the student’s confidence and comfort level with the school experience carried over into the new school year.

Claudia Yerena is the mother of a student who went through the program this summer. She says she can see a difference in the preparedness level in her five-year-old son who just entered kindergarten and her seven-year-old.

“It’s a huge difference between them,” Yerena says. “My older boy was very scared and shy and refusing to go to school. It’s totally different with my second boy.

“He was so excited. He was ready to go. He has more confidence. He also started with more academic skills.”

Steiner says that funding will be crucial to continue this program, and the FSA in general, in the future. Funding has been set aside by the Orange County Commissioners. Steiner says the group will look to other funding sources to ensure the program continues.

Parvey says that getting the students prepared for the day they enter school greatly increases the chance to close the achievement gap and Lanier says teachers can push a classroom further if all students are on equal footing on the first day.

OCTOBER 19, 2015

Orange County's Family Success Alliance reports pre-K prep program making progress

Highlights

Government and community coalition building pipeline of success for children

Testing results show proficiency rate increased from 9 percent to 67 percent

Results will drive improvements; Alliance planning more programs

By Tammy Grubb

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HILLSBOROUGH

A pilot program meant to prepare disadvantaged children for kindergarten success has seen significant progress in its first year, officials with Family Success Alliance said Monday.

The [Alliance](#), a coalition of government agencies and community partners, is building a cradle-to-career pipeline for low-income students. The effort is founded on the success of similar programs, such as the East Durham Children's Initiative and Harlem Children's Zone.

Successful programs could be used in other neighborhoods in the future.

The kindergarten readiness program is a pilot effort to level the academic playing field, funded with \$75,000 from Orange County.

"We're thrilled to report that we saw significant improvements in the assessment scores of children that participated in this first year of the kindergarten readiness program," said Michael Steiner,

chairman of the Alliance's Advisory Council. "This is the start of multiple interventions that will carry these children on a pipeline to young adult success."

Results from the first year of the program were released at a news conference.

Success was measured by testing the children before and after the program with the N.C. Kindergarten Entrance Assessment and other measures of literacy, math, and social and emotional skills.

While only about 9 percent of the children measured proficient before the program, officials said, 67 percent were proficient by the end. Their teachers reported "moderate to substantial gains," and 84 percent of parents said the program better prepared their children for kindergarten.

Alliance partners worked with Chapel Hill-Carrboro and Orange County schools teachers to identify children qualified for the program and contact their families.

Sixty-six families agreed to join the program, which exposed them to the social, emotional and academic environment of the classroom. The half-day classes were small – no more than eight students to one teacher – and were held in July and August at New Hope, Carrboro and Frank Porter Graham elementary schools.

The schools are located in two zones with high concentrations of children in poverty – Zone 6 in Chapel Hill-Carrboro and Zone 4 in rural Orange County.

At least 70 percent of program participants qualified for free or reduced-price lunch, a common indicator of poverty, and 62 percent were Hispanic, a report shows. A quarter of the students were white.

Just over half had a prior education experience, they said.

Parents also received instruction in how to read with their children, help with learning and have productive conversations about school. All of them were there to celebrate with their children when the program ended, said Ambra Wilson, assistant principal of New Hope Elementary.

Parent Claudia Yerena said her 5-year-old son had a very different experience going to kindergarten this year than his 7-year-old brother did two years ago. Her older son was scared and shy, she said, refusing to go to school. His younger brother was excited and ready to start.

The younger brother has more confidence, she said.

"He also started with more academic skills (and) at school, I think he took it more seriously," Yerena said. "He made friends, and he knows the teachers, he knows the routine, where everything goes. ... He's not afraid of anything right now."

Alliance partners already are considering how to improve next year's kindergarten readiness program and add other programs to help children. Program staff and teachers made several recommendations, from adding more enrichment activities and field trips to expanding enrollment, serving more children with no school experience and finding more ways to get parents involved.

The program also has potential for helping to close the minority achievement gap, said Magda Parvey, assistant superintendent for instructional services in the Chapel Hill-Carrboro district.

When students lack basic skills that other students come in with, it puts them at a deficit, Parvey said.

"So coming in with some language, coming in and understanding what school is about," Parvey said. "That puts them on equal footing."

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Read more here: <http://www.newsobserver.com/news/local/community/chapel-hill-news/article40429416.html#storylink=cpy>

Hookah bars are a thing of Chapel Hill's past

ZHAI YUN TAN | PUBLISHED 10/19/15 10:20PM

CORRECTIONS: The original version of this article misrepresented the rule prohibiting smoking in public places. The 2010 statewide smoking ban does not apply in public places, it only applies to bars and restaurants. The 2012 Orange County rule also prohibits smoking outdoors in any place owned or maintained by the towns or county. The original version of this article misrepresented indoor smoking rooms. In Orange County, indoor areas where the public is allowed or invited is required to be smoke-free, unless that space is explicitly exempted from the rule. The story has been updated to reflect these changes.

After Hookah Bliss closed in 2010, hookah bars have all but disappeared in Chapel Hill — and it's likely to stay that way. The 2012 Orange County Smoke-Free Public Places Rule effectively prohibited smoking in bars and restaurants, as well as outdoors in any place owned or maintained by the towns or county. The rule came at the heels of a statewide smoking ban in public places passed in 2010.

Certain places, such as cigar bars, tobacco shops and private clubs, were exempted in the county ban as long as the businesses met specific requirements set by the law.

But hookah bars are not considered tobacco shops.

"We don't have a specific ban against hookah, but the Orange County ban is as comprehensive as it could be," said Coby Jansen Austin, tobacco prevention and control officer for the Orange County Health Department. "If there is any place inside where the public is invited or allowed, then the establishment is not allowed to allow smoking."

Smoking hookah involves heating tobacco mixed with various flavorings. The smoke is passed through water and inhaled through a pipe and a mouthpiece. Hookah bars, which are gaining popularity in many parts of the world, allow customers to puff away either in a room or outdoors. Many restaurants also offer hookah as part of its services.

There are three shops on Franklin Street that sell hookah sets — Hazmat, Expressions and Smoke Rings Smoke Shop. But all three locations do not have smoking rooms or hookah bars. Hookah Bliss, the last known business in the area to offer hookah bars, closed down when the statewide ban was implemented.

Chapel Hill Zoning Enforcement Officer Mike Klein said he has only received one business inquiry about hookah bars in recent years.

For Chapel Hill residents who want to smoke hookah in public, they might have to go to Raleigh or Durham, where rules are less stringent.

UNC senior Lauren Ashley buys hookah sets from Chapel Hill, but she goes to Raleigh to visit the hookah bars.

“I usually go to Paradise (Hookah Lounge) in Raleigh,” Ashley said. “Maybe once every month.”

Shahrazad Hookah Lounge and Coffee in Raleigh is one site that draws visitors from many towns in North Carolina. Customers are free to smoke anywhere.

“I know people come from other cities to visit our hookah bar because we are the biggest in the Triangle,” manager Amber Lilly said. “I used to go to a (hookah) bar in Raleigh and a lot of regulars are from Chapel Hill.”

While many argue that hookah is safer than cigarettes, the Center of Disease Control and Prevention said on its website that hookah smoking is as risky as cigarette smoking. The secondhand smoke from hookahs comes from the burning tobacco and charcoal used to heat the tobacco, therefore posing health risks to nonsmokers.

Austin said Orange County’s strict ban of smoking in public places was made following a comprehensive survey in 2012, public hearings and presentations from involved parties.

“When the state passed the bars and restaurant rule and listed preemptions they enabled us to pass laws that are more restrictive,” Austin said. “What we heard was people wanted us to pass a rule that was more restrictive.”

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Read more: <http://www.dailytarheel.com/article/2015/10/hookah-bars-are-a-thing-of-chapel-hills-past>

UNC Health Care and UNC School of Medicine Newsroom

UNC Children's joins new anti-poverty coalition

UNC's Division of General Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine is an integral partner in the new coalition tackling the ill effects of poverty in Orange County, from cradle to career.



[click to enlarge](#) Dr. Mike Steiner

addresses a Family Success Alliance meeting.

By Patrick James, UNC School of Journalism

Despite Orange County being among the wealthiest counties in North Carolina, some families still struggle to provide necessary resources for their children, making it difficult for them to succeed.

“Orange County is generally seen as—and it is—a relative wealthy county within North Carolina,” says **Michael Steiner, MD**, chief of general pediatrics at N.C. Children’s Hospital. “But even within Orange County, over the past 10 to 12 years, there’s been a doubling of child poverty. And with that, a high number of children aren’t ready to enter school at kindergarten, and a high percentage of children don’t reach a grade level past third grade. And we have increases in other bad education outcomes, like not finishing high school.”

In an effort to set these children up for success and provide them with the necessary resources to live a healthy life, the Orange County Health Department has developed a coalition of government agencies, health care and education advocates and community organizations known as the **Family Success Alliance**.

Steiner, a member representing UNC Children's on the alliance's advisory council, says there are multiple long-term effects associated with child poverty and that the Family Success Alliance, which is based on similar models such as the Harlem Children's Initiative, hopes to steer children facing poverty in a new direction.

“Adverse experiences during childhood can impact everything from cardiovascular risk as an adult to mental health as an adult to social outcomes like success in jobs,” explains Steiner. “So what the Family Success Alliance seeks to do is replicate the Harlem Children's Zones initiative and use a geographic-based pipeline basically to usher kids from birth to their first job or their first year in college and help ensure success despite adversity they may face related to finances, economics or other things that are causing them to have a hard time making ends meet during childhood.”

According to the Health Department's website, the Family Success Alliance Council—which consists of nearly 20 members—selected two zones from a pool of six in December to serve in the coalition's first project. The six zones were recognized by the Health Department as containing the highest number of county residents struggling to obtain basic needs, such as food, health care and housing.

Stacy Shelp, the communications manager and public information officer for the Health Department, says the first two zones will serve as a learning experience for what the Family Success Alliance can do in the future in the other zones as well as throughout the county. “Because there are six zones—and we're hoping that eventually we'll be able to help all six zones—the first two zones that are selected are going to really be piloting and helping us learn and develop and to be able to expand into the additional zones as we go,” says Shelp. “While there's the initial application process to get us out of the gate, we're hoping it will also be educational in helping us move forward.”

Shelp adds that while efforts have been made by many different organizations and government agencies to solve various issues surrounding poverty, the Family Success Alliance's collective impact model will allow all of these groups to work together to provide assistance to children facing poverty in Orange County.

“By working together, we're able to be more efficient and to streamline our resources, our expertise and our staff in a way that can create this pipeline,” explains Shelp. “Often we have used the term safety net, but safety nets have holes. Pipelines don't. So what we really want to do is create this pipeline from cradle to career or college for kids where they don't fall through the gaps and so we can identify what those gaps are and work together as one strong, cohesive unit to create that successful outcome for those children.”

Rabid Bat Found on Hillsborough Playground

By [Elizabeth Friend](#)

Posted October 7, 2015 at 9:51 am



Photo via by Don Pfritzer for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Orange County Animal Services reports a rabid bat was found at a Hillsborough elementary school last week.

Last Thursday, several children came across the carcass of the bat on the playground. Some reportedly kicked the dead bat around before teachers became aware of the situation. The bat was removed for testing.

A nurse from the Orange County Health Department is consulting with the families of the children involved to determine if they require post-exposure treatment.

The incident is the eighth reported case of rabies in Orange County so far this year, and the third to involve a bat. Last year, 23 cases were confirmed. The majority of those involved raccoons.

The Herald-Sun

Orange County residents discuss health concerns

- FROM STAFF REPORTS
- Updated Oct 3, 2015

CHAPEL HILL — Orange County may have been named the healthiest county in North Carolina this year, but there's still a lot of work to be done.

Healthy Carolinians of Orange County (HCOC) and the Orange County Health Department (OCHD) invite residents to attend community listening sessions that are being held in October. Participants will learn about health concerns discovered during conversations with community members through the collection of the 2015 Orange County Community Health Assessment survey and focus groups, which took place in the summer.

HCOC encourages residents to attend the listening sessions to discuss survey results and to help select priority health issues. This information will help the OCHD and its partners develop a plan for improving health across the community. The listening sessions will also help HCOC select focus areas for its various health improvement committees.

The sessions will start with a review of community health data. Then, session participants will break into small-group discussions and select their top five health priorities. Local policymakers and Board of Health members will attend as well, to hear residents' concerns and ideas regarding Orange County health issues. HCOC will present forum results at its annual meeting Nov. 13 with a final list of priority issues.

Help Orange County know what health issues affect you and what prevents you or others around you from being as healthy as possible, and contribute to a plan of improving everyone's health by attending one of the community forums. Date, time and location are as follows:

- Monday, Oct. 5, 6-8 p.m., Frank Porter Graham Elementary, 101 Smith Level Road. Chapel Hill
- Tuesday, Oct. 6, 4-6 p.m., Mt. Zion AME Church, 5124 N.C. 86, Hillsborough
- Oct. 20, 4-6 p.m., UNC Hospital, Hillsborough Campus, 430 Waterstone Drive, Hillsborough
- Oct. 22, 6-8 p.m., Efland-Cheeks Community Center, 117 Richmond Road. Efland

For more information, or to register to attend one of the above listening sessions, contact Ashley

Mercer, Healthy Carolinians Coordinator, at 919-245-2440  919-245-2440 or by email at hcoc@orangecountync.gov.



Hillsborough kids play with rabid bat found dead on playground, officials say

WNCN News Published: October 2, 2015, 5:29 pm

HILLSBOROUGH, NC (WNCN) — Orange County Animal Services has received its eighth positive rabies test result of the year, according to the North Carolina State Laboratory of Public Health.

This incident involved a bat. The County recorded a total of 23 positive cases last year, a marked increase in the number from the two previous years which had 12 positive cases each.

The case originated on Thursday, when a dead bat was found on the playground of a Hillsborough elementary school. Several students reportedly kicked the dead bat around before teachers were informed of its presence. Once informed, they removed the bat from the play area safely and called Animal Control to remove it for testing.

No animals are involved in the case, but a Communicable Disease Nurse from the Orange County Health Department is contacting the families to evaluate whether the children involved are at risk of rabies exposure. As always, a decision about the post-exposure prophylaxis that protects people from rabies is based upon an assessment of all the factors involved in this type situation.

Of the few cases of rabies in humans in the United States in recent years, most have been traced to bats. If there is any possibility of exposure from a bat, it is critical that the bat be safely contained without human contact and that citizens immediately contact their animal control program. If an incident involving a bat – or other rabies vector – should occur outside regular office hours, an Animal Control Officer can be reached by calling 9-1-1.

The other dominant host species in our area is the raccoon. Other animals can contract rabies a host species, a process known as the “spillover effect.” The other species that are most susceptible to getting rabies from raccoons are dogs and cats, groundhogs, foxes and skunks.

2015 LOW-COST RABIES VACCINATION CLINIC SCHEDULE

The final Low-Cost Rabies Vaccination Clinics of 2015 will take place:

- Thursday, October 8, from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. at the River Park Farmers’ Market Pavilion, located at 140 E Margaret Lane in Hillsborough. Only cash will be accepted for this clinic.
- Thursday, November 12, from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. at the Animal Services Center, located at 1601 Eubanks Road in Chapel Hill. Microchips will also be available at this clinic for \$25.

The cost for rabies vaccinations is \$10. Clinic dates for 2016 will be posted at <http://orangecountync.gov/AnimalServices/rabies.asp> toward the beginning of the year.

For more information, please call Orange County Animal Services at 919.942.7387.

The Herald-Sun

Family Success Alliance seeks feedback to decide on next steps

- Katie Jansen
- Updated Oct 3, 2015

HILLSBOROUGH — Plans for the Family Success Alliance continued last week at community meetings designed both to spread the word about the organization's work and to gather feedback from residents.

The organization will use the feedback gathered to decide how to best spend the remainder of the social justice funding it received from the county.

Zone navigators Ali Rojas and Angela Clapp, as well as zone champions Aviva Scully and Rosemary Dean, were on hand to represent the geographical area that is Zone 4 (Hillsborough east of I-40).

Hiring the zone navigators was one of two pilot programs launched this summer; another two were hired to represent Zone 6 (Chapel Hill and Carrboro).

Family Success Alliance also began its initial kindergarten readiness program this summer, which was offered to about 70 students at New Hope Elementary, Carrboro Elementary and Frank Porter Graham Elementary.

At Tuesday evening's meeting at A.L. Stanback Middle School, Family Success Alliance representatives and staff from the health department asked attendees to share their written comments to a series of questions about desired programming.

The Family Success Alliance asked what kind of services residents would like to see, as well as what barriers prevented them from participating in existing programming.

The alliance also wanted to know which of three services was most important to families in attendance: kindergarten readiness, parent support or afterschool programming.

Karen Wysocki, who works in the department of pediatrics at UNC Hospitals, said she believes all parents can benefit from support.

She was attending her first Family Success Alliance meeting because she said she hopes to get involved as a volunteer when she retires.

Wysocki's background is in early childcare and parent support, and she said that many of the services being suggested by the Family Success Alliance go hand-in-hand.

Some in attendance saw necessary services omitted from the list. Gwen Vareene-Pierce, who has worked with Head Start, an early childcare program, for nine years, said that the programs would only be beneficial to families if they had a way to get there.

In her years working in Hillsborough's neighborhoods, Vareene-Pierce said she has seen transportation as one of the biggest limiting factors.

Although Vareene-Pierce said she agreed after school was important to provide children with structure, it wouldn't help if their parents weren't able to pick them up.

This was a sentiment that was echoed throughout the written comments.

The information gathered at the meetings will be taken to the Family Success Alliance advisory council when it convenes Oct. 19, and next steps will be decided at that meeting.