

Reach NC Voices

Building the New Public Square.

In January 2017, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina made a strategic investment in North Carolina's communities which allowed EducationNC to launch Reach NC Voices. Through Reach NC Voices, EducationNC and our affiliate, the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research, seek to spark a statewide conversation, informing North Carolinians about issues affecting their communities and bridging divides between those in power and those who have traditionally been excluded. We consider Reach NC Voices our 21st century Town Hall. It is our attempt to build a new public square for our state.

We ask you to consider the work of Reach NC Voices in three primary ways:

1. As a technology platform
2. As a set of strategies
3. As our overarching goal

We developed Reach NC Voices because we believe that our communities are stronger when all voices are included in discussions and debates about the critical issues affecting our state and our communities. These transparent and inclusive discussions can lead to increased trust, and, we hope, increased likelihood that North Carolinians will participate in their democracy.

North Carolina's public, private, and nonprofit sectors need tools to listen to the priorities and concerns of those they serve. Our influencers need access to and trust from all those who might be affected by policy.

And most importantly, North Carolinians need a simple and compelling way to be to be engaged — and once engaged in discussion and debate, to stay engaged.

An Architecture for Participation

Reach NC Voices builds upon EducationNC's existing architecture for participation, providing trusted information, starting conversations, and encouraging civic engagement.

As a provider of **trusted information**, Reach NC Voices provides localized, personalized information via text, Facebook Messenger, and email in an effort to increase understanding of critical issues. When sharing information, we provide context and nuance that describes the complete narrative, not just the attention-grabbing headlines that can misrepresent complex issues.

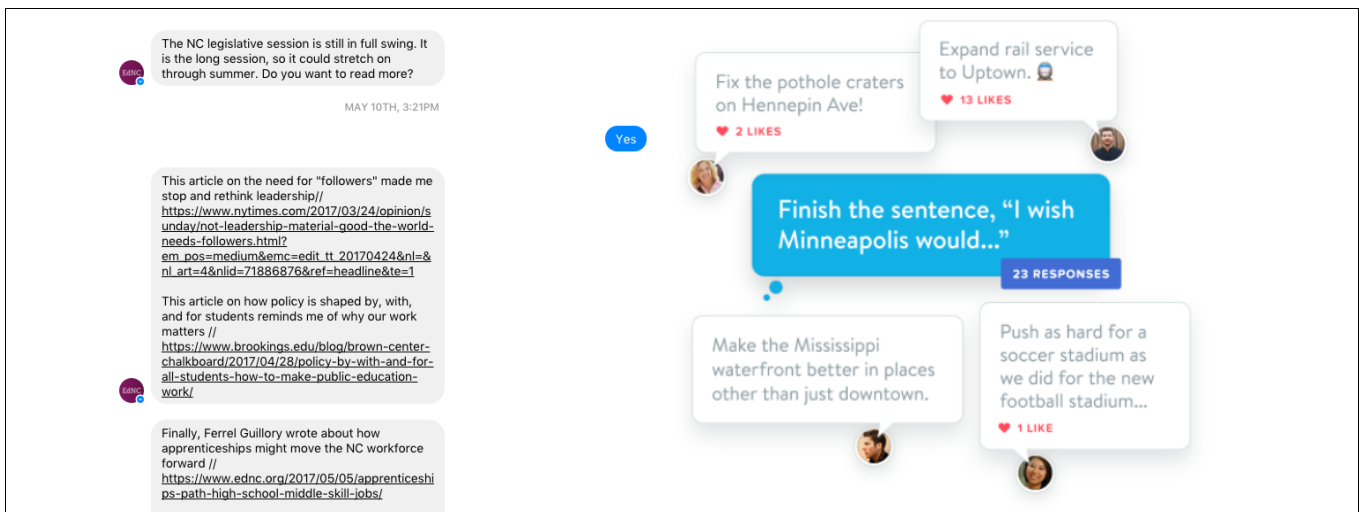
This information serves as a **conversation starter**, encouraging users to share their story or cast a vote on pressing issues. As North Carolinians share their stories of what's

working (and what's not) in their communities or schools, we reach out to them, ask for more information, and publish select stories on EducationNC's website. As we build up the base of North Carolinians we're in conversation with, we also offer policy briefs and in-depth packages of data and stories to guide policymaking in areas of key public concern.

As a **civic engagement initiative**, Reach NC Voices provides users with tailored information that allows them to take action on the issues most important to them. For instance, if a user responds to a set of questions about school funding, we can reply with information about an upcoming Board of County Commissioners meeting about school funding. Our goal is to broaden the pool of those who engage in critical issues, with an eye towards action and results.

The Reach NC Voices technology includes messaging tools, which start conversations and encourage engagement, and mapping technologies, which allow us to have these conversations people in a defined area and confirm that we are reaching people who are representative of that area.

Messaging bots simulate a human dialogue or conversation, allowing us to have deeper conversations with our fellow North Carolinians at scale.



Online surveys allow us to ask North Carolinians their view of the news of the day and to share their stories. We seek to understand not just what people think, but why they think it.

[@NationHahn](#). We are excited to bring you on this journey.

Reach NC Voices Poll by EdNC

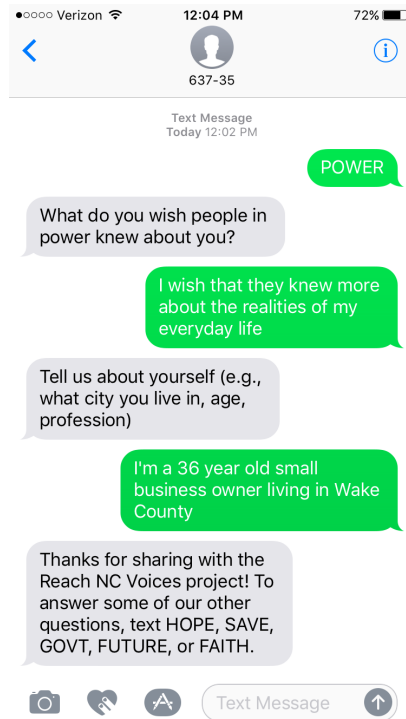
Which of the following platforms do you use to find information? Check all that apply.

<input type="radio"/> National News Sites	<input type="radio"/> Local News Sites
<input type="radio"/> Facebook	<input type="radio"/> Twitter
<input type="radio"/> Snapchat	<input type="radio"/> Instagram
<input type="radio"/> Other	

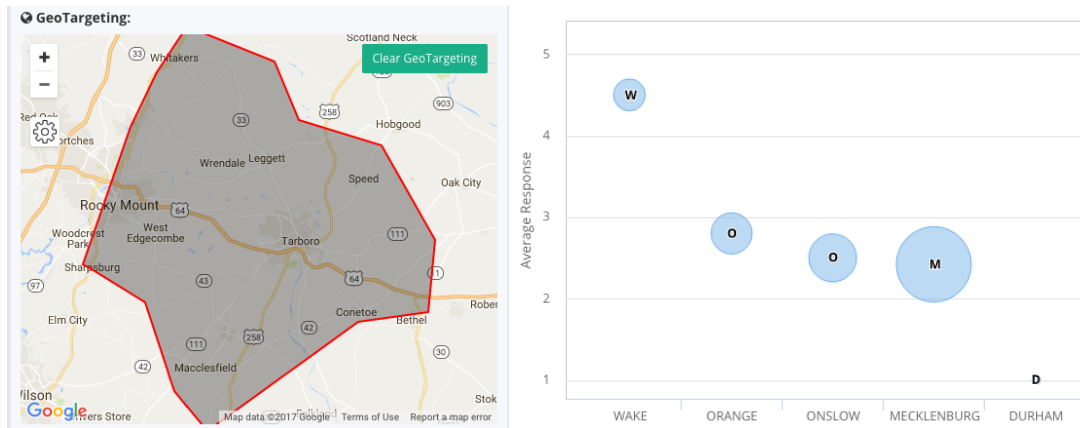
SELECT YOUR RESPONSES

[SKIP](#) ▶

Text messaging enables us to ask targeted questions to specific schools, neighborhoods, or communities. We meet people where they are.

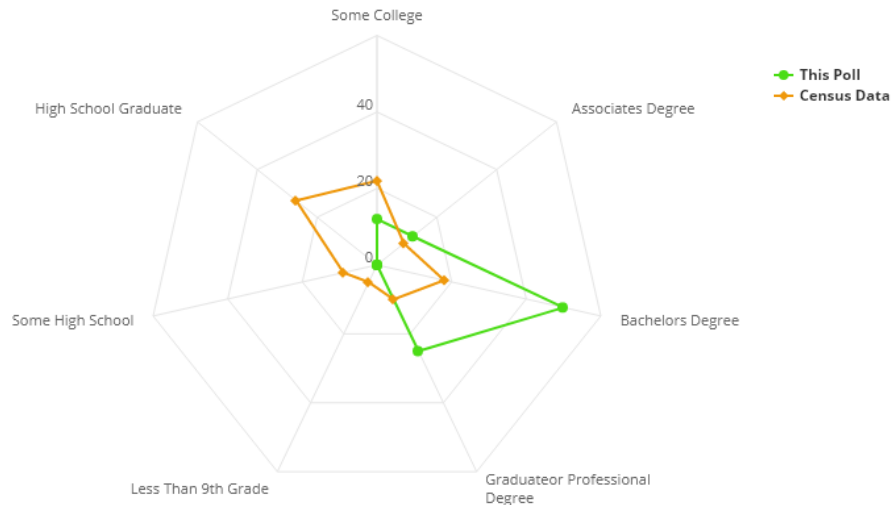


GIS mapping allows us to set the parameters on the region, community, or neighborhood that we'd like to study and then immediately gather data and engage.



Census weighting allows us to weight responses by age, race, sex, marital status, and education level at the county level. This tool allows us to compare our survey

sample's demographic to that of Census data, ensuring that we are accurately capturing all voices a specific community.



Targeting Suggestions

The health of this poll is **moderate**. It could be improved by targeting less **Bachelors Degree**, less **Never Married**, more **High School Graduate**.

Reach NC Voices Outcomes and Accomplishments

Since its January 2017 launch, Reach NC Voices content and question sets have been in front of over 1,000,000 North Carolinians, over 45,000 of whom have engaged in online surveys and dialogue. We have engaged residents in each of North Carolina's 100 counties. We have engaged this number and range of North Carolinians by working closely with community partners to set targets for the voices that need to be heard and design meaningful survey questions that get to the heart of the issue being explored. Our work is both topical and regional, focusing on topics including the future for our children and needs of communities such as Edgecombe and Durham Counties.

North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation. Reach NC Voices' inaugural project involved engaging 2,578 North Carolina parents in a conversation about their hopes and dreams for their children. We have been able to reach this number of parents by involving our project partner, the North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation, in survey distribution at the community level and placing the survey in mainstream and social media sites. In short, we met these parents where they were — some engaged using online polls, some via texting, and some using bots to “converse.”

Education and success were the most common threads in parents' dreams for their children. We also saw evidence of the interconnected systems that all children need: to be healthy in order to learn in schools, to have teachers who are teachers “socially and emotionally healthy” to support our children, and to have communities with leaders who

focus on creating and promoting healthy opportunities for our children to grow both personally and professionally.

The insights gathered from these conversations are feeding into the North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation's Pathways to Grade Level Reading initiative, a statewide effort to ensure that all North Carolina children, regardless of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, are reading at grade level by the end of third grade. As the barriers identified by parents relate to student learning outcomes, Pathways will incorporate system-level solutions into recommendations for meeting the Pathways' goal of grade level reading by third grade.

North Edgecombe High School. North Carolina's Edgecombe County, located in the eastern part of the state, has been devastated by two 100-year floods in the last 20 years. Forty-three percent of children in the county live in poverty, lending to its ranking as 98th out of 100 counties in the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's health outcomes rankings.

In winter and spring 2017, we received support from ChildTrust Foundation and others to work in Edgecombe County. Our work began with North Edgecombe High School, a predominantly African-American high school in which 99% of the 244 students receive free and reduced lunch. Our goal was to help the principal include student voice in school improvement discussions. Students engaged in text-based surveys and conversations that allowed us to uncover the students' underlying interests behind their recommendation.

We learned that students wanted increased agency in the decisions that affect their education. Students shared that they saw inequities in the cleanliness of restrooms, in the enforcement of dress code, and expectations of assignments that required Internet access. The principal has acted on this new information, prioritizing restroom renovation and equal enforcement of the dress code in his school improvement plan. The principal has also asked us to create a Reach-based communications tool: Listening Mode enable the principal to stay connected with students and provide accountability for the school improvement plan priorities, as students will be able to share whether they are seeing on the ground changes as a result of their feedback.

In the coming year, we will work with the Edgecombe County school system to inform staff training and professional development on adverse childhood experiences and trauma-sensitive teaching. We will use Reach NC Voices to learn about what students are currently experiencing — Are they living in cars? Are they skipping meals? And, most importantly, why? The district will use this information to train staff on the best ways to support the unique needs of their students.

Durham Public Schools. Durham County's public school system is North Carolina's 8th largest district. It was not until 1970 that schools in the district were desegregated, and separate city and county districts remained in place until 1992. Currently, 66% of students in the district receive free and reduced lunch.

In spring 2017, Reach NC Voices helped Durham Public Schools bring student voice into the

conversation about the design of a summer meal program (and student hunger more broadly). We began this process with an in-person workshop in which we explored the root of barriers to bringing students fresh, healthy meals. We explored these initial insights through in-person and Reach-based data collection in schools and communities. Through these conversations, we heard student observations that the summer meal program and home would be stronger if it offered meals that stemmed from what kids actually ate at home.

This year, the system will run a district-wide contest to gather family recipes, adapt them (if needed) to fit healthy eating standards, and publish both original and adapted recipes in a cookbook that will be available to all students. Ten of the published recipes will become part of the district's regular meal rotation, creating a stronger connection between school and home. We plan to use Reach NC Voices to collect the recipes, as well as any family stories behind the recipes.

This fall, Reach NC Voices will broaden conversations on this topic by using Reach technology at public events to engage more Durham parents, students, and educators in a conversation about student access to food.