

FORWARD TOGETHER

THE STATE OF FLINT'S EARLY CHILDHOOD COLLABORATIVE 2016-2020



Flint
Early Childhood
Collaborative

Note to Funders and Partners

Ja'Nel Jamerson & Isaiah Oliver

Dear Friends,

For four years, the Flint Early Childhood Collaborative (FECC) has worked in partnership with others to develop strategies that increase access to equitable, high quality early education. In this first report to the community we highlight the establishment of the organization and how we are working together with partners to move forward a new vision for all Flint children.

FECC was born out of the Flint water crisis when the need for high quality education became even more relevant. Through its work with the Flint Kids Fund grantmaking committee, and understanding the long-term effects of lead exposure, the Collaborative emerged as a project of the Community Foundation of Greater Flint. Moving forward, the FECC plays a key role in carrying out the community foundation's strategic objective of strengthening the quality of education along the continuum from pre-K through post-secondary enrollment and completion.

We have accomplished much this year, despite the challenges of a global pandemic. The year brought change in executive leadership and in our research partner. The data analysis team is sharing information on quality improvement with teachers, a new governance structure for the FECC has been implemented and is more inclusive, and teachers and staff completed a checklist for baseline measurement.

Serving 400 students at Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations is a wonderful achievement. But there is still a gap of 2,700 slots in early childhood programs. Our goal is to share our knowledge and resources to continue reducing the gap for Flint youngest children.

Thank you for supporting FECC's investment in the Educare Model, which incorporates everything science says young children need to flourish. With your continued partnership young children will get the right support in their early years to ensure their success not only in kindergarten but far into adulthood.




Ja'Nel Jamerson
Educare Flint and Flint Early
Childhood Collaborative


Isaiah Oliver
Community Foundation
of Greater Flint

About FECC

The Flint Early Childhood Collaborative is a diverse group of motivated partners supporting new opportunities for Flint's youngest children and their families. It comprises an experienced, cross-sector group of institutions committed to improving equity in education and health services, including the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Community Foundation of Greater Flint, Flint Community Schools, and Genesee Intermediate School District.

This group came together in response to the Flint Water Crisis to (1) address early interventions for children ages 0-5 and their families and (2) work with (and within) the community to ensure all of Flint's youngest children have access to high-quality early education. To do this, we implement a "hub model" focused on meeting the needs of two-generations—children and their parents or caregivers—while also serving as a central resource to other early childhood professionals in Flint.

With our partners and families, we are changing the narrative about Flint—especially as it concerns its youngest citizens and their families. This is not just a city that has been affected by a water emergency; it is a diverse community of people working to move forward together by building sustainable and equitable solutions. Our core priorities work together to build strategies that increase Flint residents' access to a sustainable and equitable high-quality early education and care system. They include:

- **High-Quality Teaching & Learning:** We embrace the core components of the Educare Model as a framework for high-quality teaching and learning. Our partners collaborate to implement the model at two hubs—Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations—which serve 400 Flint children and their families and address unmet quality improvement needs for early childhood professionals in Flint.
- **Intensive Family Engagement:** We aim to transform how Flint families with young children interact with each other and the systems that exist to serve them by providing a more connected, community-wide, whole family strategy. We understand that when families are healthy, stable, and adequately supported, children can succeed far into adulthood. Our intensive family engagement strategies espouse a two-generational approach that recognizes the critical tie between the well-being of parents and their children's social-emotional, physical, and cognitive development.
- **Enhanced Professional Development:** We aim to raise the bar for early childhood educators by enhancing their instructional teaching practices through enhanced professional development opportunities. With our partners, we provide targeted coaching and development supports for early childhood educators to continuously improve their practice and the quality of their classrooms.
- **Research & Advocacy:** We aim to build and use an integrated data system to understand where families and children are, what they really want, how to help them thrive, and to prove the short and long-term benefits of high-quality early childhood education. Our partners collaborate with researchers, families, schools, and system leaders to demonstrate the impact of our approach and to advocate for changes in policy that ensure all children have access to evidence-based early education.
- **Coordinated Systems:** We aim to identify and address existing enrollment challenges, and create a system that is more efficient, transparent, and equitable.



GROWING TOGETHER:

High Quality Teaching and Learning

More than two decades of research and practice in early childhood development affirm one inescapable conclusion: the experiences children have in their first five years of life shape their brains and bodies in lasting ways. Even as we have come to understand more of what children need to thrive, several factors—economic, social, and demographic— will make it difficult for low-income parents to give it to them. This opportunity gap, if unaddressed, becomes an achievement gap, thereby reinforcing inter-generational cycles of poverty. Fortunately, the Flint Early Childhood Collaborative has committed to partnering with families, schools, funders, and community-based organizations to ensure that income does not determine Flint kids' destinies.

Children who get the right supports in their earliest years are more likely to succeed in kindergarten and beyond. The Flint Early Childhood Collaborative and its partners are working together to develop a coordinated system of high-quality early childhood education and care that begins when children are infants and gives them a fair chance at success in school and in life. Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations represent our aspiration for the entire Flint community by leveraging

Providing Early Education & Care For More Than 400 Children And Addressing Unmet Quality Improvement Supports For Educators Throughout Flint

publicly-funded early education programs and community partnerships to provide full-day, full-year early childhood education and care for children birth-to-age 5. The integration of health, social-emotional, and family support into these schools emphasize the crucial role of high-quality early childhood education and care programs for young children and their families.

The Flint Early Childhood Collaborative embraces the core components of the Educare Model—high-quality teaching practices, intensive family engagement, embedded professional development, and data utilization—as a framework for high-quality teaching and learning. As we continue to move forward, lessons learned at Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations will be used to (1) inform the development and refinement of family engagement interventions, (2) curate intensified professional development offerings, (3) inform early childhood policies and practices, and (4) expand our network of high-quality early childhood stakeholders.

Our Approach

Launched in the wake of the Flint water crisis as the Flint Early Childhood Collaborative's premier strategies to increase access to early childhood education and care, Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations serve as hubs, providing early education and care for more than 400 children and addressing unmet quality improvement supports for early childhood educators throughout Flint.

Cummings Great Expectations opened in 2016 with support from the C.S. Mott Foundation, the Pritzker Foundation, and the Flint Kids Fund. The newly renovated former Flint elementary school includes 12 early learning classrooms and serves 180 children and their families each year. The school's innovative curriculum embraces an Educare-inspired approach and utilizes the Reggio Emilia philosophy, which emphasizes exploration and discovery and respects the child's innate ability to learn.

Opened in 2017 as the only Educare school in Michigan, Educare Flint includes 18 early learning classrooms and serves 220 children each year. The 36,000 square-foot facility is located on the campus of Durant-Turri-Mott Elementary School and was developed with support from the C.S. Mott Foundation, Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation, and the Flint Kids Fund. As part of the Educare Learning Network, managed by Start Early (formerly the Ounce of Prevention Fund) and the Buffet Early Childhood Fund, Educare Flint participates in best-in-class research, advocacy, and professional learning that equips the school's staff to innovate and improve early childhood practices and policies continually.





The Educare Model's core components—data utilization, high-quality teaching practices, intensive family engagement, and embedded professional development—guide the techniques used by Cummings Great Expectations and Educare Flint to promote learning and development in children. Embedded professional development support from highly-qualified Early Childhood Specialists and low teacher-to-student ratios ensure that instruction is individualized for each child's unique learning needs.

Parents, caregivers, and families are the fabric of our approach to high-quality teaching and learning. To support family and community engagement, both schools include adult education and training spaces for specialized programming offered by a Parent Navigator. Families also receive intensive coaching and support from Family Engagement Advocates, who partner with parents in achieving their goals for their children and families.

Today, only four years since our hub strategy began, Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations serve as strong examples of the value of strategic investments in early education and care. They create opportunities for Flint's youngest children and their families by promoting effective practices and policies that improve access to high-quality early childhood education and care and serving as a pilot to other communities throughout the state and the nation.

THE EDUCARE MODEL

The Educare Model is based on research from early childhood development, social work, and other allied fields. Strong leadership and community linkages support implementing the model and developing a culture of high-quality teaching and learning by connecting evidence-based early education interventions with additional services, such as health and wellness services. These four core features work together comprehensively and intentionally to achieve a high-quality early childhood program that helps Flint children from birth-to-age five grow up safe, healthy,

and eager to learn. Using the Educare Model, the Flint Early Childhood Collaborative and its partners prepare children for success in school and life and help parents develop the skills they need to champion their children's education.

High-Quality Teaching Practices

- Low Student-to-Teacher Ratios; Small Class Sizes
The average infant/toddler teacher-to-student ratio is 3:8; the average for pre-school is 3:17.
- Continuity of Care
Children remain with the same teachers and family engagement advocate from program entry until they transition to kindergarten.
- Curriculum
The curriculum includes an intentional emphasis on language & literacy, foundational mathematics, and social-emotional development.

Intensive Family Engagement

- Family-Centered Coaching
Family engagement staff partner with parents to ensure their children's long-term success by addressing their needs and supporting them in making progress on their goals.
- Two-Generation Approach
Schools partner with families in collaborative and reciprocal ways to build mutually-respectful, goal-oriented relationships that support strong parent-child relationships, family well-being, and ongoing learning and development for both parents and children.

Embedded Professional Development

- Targeted Coaching & Development
Staff participate in on- and off-site professional development opportunities with partners such as, the Educare Learning Network, Conscious Discipline, Brazelton Touchpoints, and Genesee Intermediate School District.
- Highly Qualified Staff
Early Childhood Specialists have master's degrees; Lead Teachers have bachelor's degrees; Assistant Teachers have associate's degrees.
- Reflective Practice & Supervision
Early Childhood Specialists provide individualized coaching to teachers by modeling effective practices and providing targeted instructional support through parallel teaching and providing formal and informal feedback.

Data Utilization

- Research & Continuous Improvement
Ongoing data collection enables staff to monitor children's development closely and provide feedback to teachers and parents about what they can do to better support children—in real-time. Staff utilizes student- and family-level data to inform the development of lesson plans and family engagement activities.
- Research-Program Partnership
Staff, parents, K-12 leaders, funders, and community partners collaborate to champion a culture of continuous improvement by developing, implementing, and monitoring action plans that address community-level issues in early childhood education and care.

LOCAL SCHOOLS, NATIONAL IMPACT

The Flint Early Childhood Collaborative's approach to high-quality teaching and learning emphasizes replicable and scalable practices that have relevance in various early childhood settings. As part of the Educare Learning Network, our partners benefit from connections with early education leaders and practitioners from across the country who have also committed to transforming the system of early education and care. Through this partnership, we continue to build strong public and private partnerships across the state and the country to create long-term systemic changes that benefit Flint's youngest and most vulnerable learners.



More than 30 local and national partners



100% Low-income Children and Families



400 Children Served



90% of children stay with the same teachers until transitioning to kindergarten

A Note From Our School Directors

Jodi Ramos and Michelle Townsend

As School Directors of Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations, we work closely with children, parents, teachers, and other staff members to ensure that both schools offer a safe, high-quality program for children that also provides meaningful support to families.

With a combined 51 years of working with children including opportunity youth, we both enjoy working with children as well as all our teachers, office staff, and the incredible families we serve. Flint has a huge place in our hearts, and we genuinely enjoy working in this community. Our highly skilled teaching staff, early childhood specialists, and family engagement advocates connect children, parents, and community residents with needed services. These schools provide an opportunity for children and their families to grow together. Children, parents, staff, and the extended community are the fabric of these schools. Together, we are creating early learning environments where all children can learn, grow, and be supported in becoming their very best selves.

With intensive family engagement, high-quality teaching practices, data utilization and research, and embedded professional development, our vision is to move forward together with the Flint community through a multi-generational approach. This impacts not only the children but also the parents and families, bettering the whole household. We are continuing to work toward our goal of assisting our families at large, through countless programming and resources to continue forward, together, with the Flint community.



Jodi Ramos
Jodi Ramos
Educare Flint

Michelle Townsend
Michelle Townsend
Cummings Great Expectations





LEADING TOGETHER

Intensive Family Engagement

We envision a Flint community where all families can lead, grow, and thrive. Parents and caregivers are our most important partners in bringing this vision to reality. We reject the idea that agency professionals and policymakers, alone, know what's best for children and families. Instead, we work from the assumption that effective policies and practices are made by and with the people they are intended to impact. Our Intensive Family Engagement efforts embrace a two-generational approach that emphasizes partnering with Flint families as advocates for long-term changes in the early education system and creating opportunities that place low-income families on a path toward permanent economic security.

The Parent Ambassador and Never Stop Learning programs are two-generational programs that leverage the power of parent leadership and community partnerships to remove barriers to family success, especially for young children. These initiatives create authentic family and community partnerships by providing culturally relevant, accessible, and inclusive opportunities for families to organize, grow, and lead. We believe that by influencing approaches that enable educators and policymakers to partner with parents in designing service systems, the resulting structures will be stronger and better for both generations.

PARENT AMBASSADORS

Parent ambassadors play an instrumental role in expanding our reach into the Flint community by advocating for high-quality early learning opportunities for Flint youth, families, and neighborhoods. Through interactions with local, state, and national policymakers, Ambassadors raise awareness about the value of strategic investments in early childhood education and care. The Parent Ambassador program's core philosophy is the belief that when we create conditions that allow parents to utilize their full potential, we gain access to untapped expertise that is valuable to framing early childhood education issues and solutions.

Charese McLean, Parent Navigator

As a graduate of Flint Community Schools, with more than 20 years of experience working in the Flint community as a Health Technician and Family Engagement Advocate, it is evident why Charese McLean is a perfect match for her role as Parent Navigator. In this role, Charese uses her personal and professional experiences to support Flint families in moving "forward together" by equipping them with the knowledge, information, and skills to accomplish their goals for themselves and their children.

Whether it's with food assistance programs, working with partners to create employment opportunities, or even assisting in getting parents a GED, she will do whatever it takes to help the families. Charese explained, "This is so much more than a paycheck, so much more than a job for me. What I do really goes hand-in-hand with my purpose in life."

As Parent Navigator, Charese works closely with school staff and families to identify persistent barriers that prevent parents from reaching their goals. Using this information, Charese has created several intensive family engagement initiatives, including the Never Stop Learning Program, but finds her role of inspiring hope in families to be her most important job. "Seeing that light in their eyes, that 'aha' moment, is such a great thing! It's great to see their hopelessness turn into hope," Charese explained.



NEVER STOP LEARNING

The Never Stop Learning program is a family literacy initiative that supports parents in achieving their goals for themselves and their children. We believe that families' chances at success are limited through fragmented approaches that separately address children's and parents' needs. Therefore, the Never Stop Learning program integrates adult workforce education, parent education, and parent-child interactions into high-quality early childhood education and care settings to improve outcomes for low-income parents and their children together. By strengthening the education, social capital, economic assets, health, and well-being outcomes of parents, the Never Stop Learning program supports families in overcoming barriers and taking their first steps toward a legacy of economic security.



50+ Parent Ambassador meetings with local and state policymakers



400+ hours of school
and community-based volunteer service



100% of NSL participants completed the program



200+ families served through parent-led engagement activities



Asia Moody, NSL Graduate

Asia Moody is a Flint resident and mother of four beautiful children. Before participating in the Never Stop Learning program, Asia frequently experienced homelessness and domestic violence. One day, when dropping her children off at school, she saw a recruitment flyer for NSL in the lobby and thought she would give it a try.



The Never Stop Learning program was created for parents like Asia, who have high aspirations for themselves and their children but face persistent barriers that limit their success. The program aims to inspire, motivate, and maximize parents' potential to serve as leaders and equal partners in their families and the community. Asia explained, "I attended the NSL classes for a year. I used to come in crying; I was so depressed. The class really built me up. It took me to a whole new level that I didn't know I could get to. I had never talked about my problems before, but Charese and everyone really brought that out of me."

Through her participation in the Never Stop Learning program, Asia was inspired to open up more to her children, becoming closer to each of them. She also secured a leadership position at her job. "We would do a meet-and-greet, tell each other our life stories and what we went through that day. We were all connected through our stories," Asia reflected. "Now, I have a house with all of my children, and I'm a manager at a group home. I am really happy where I am today. Educare helped my kids grow, NSL helped me grow."



LEARNING TOGETHER

Enhanced Professional Development

High-quality early childhood interventions improve children's cognitive and academic performance, and are especially vital to families who are navigating stressful circumstances. In these environments, children are healthy and safe, and parents and guardians are critical partners in the development and education of their children. Such programs make critical contributions to thriving communities and are an essential component of any workforce and economic development effort.

Recognizing the critical importance of high-quality early childhood interventions, the Flint Early Childhood Collaborative is working to enhance the quality and intensity of professional development opportunities available to early childhood professionals in Flint. In partnership with the Educare Learning Network, we have built the internal capacity to facilitate practical instruction for early childhood professionals in three core practice areas using the Educare Best Practices Training Modules. The core features work together comprehensively and intentionally to achieve a high-quality early childhood program that helps children from birth to age 5 grow up safe, healthy, and eager to learn. Practice areas covered in trainings are: data utilization, high-quality teaching practices, and intensive family engagement.

EDUCARE CORE PRACTICES TRAINING

Educare Core Practice Trainings offered by Flint Early Childhood Collaborative partners are developed for use in all center-based early childhood settings. Each module includes a (1) four-hour “Foundations of” component, which builds introductory understandings of modules; and an (2) eight-to-ten hour “In Practice” component, which develops the practical skills and competencies of early childhood professionals in the respective modules. All training modules are aligned with national standards and requirements.

DATA UTILIZATION MODULE

Early childhood programs are required to collect various types of data, but organizing, interpreting, and using the data can be overwhelming. The Data Utilization Module is designed to provide clear direction and practical instruction on how to collect and interpret data, and then make decisions to improve child and program outcomes.

Training Outcomes

- Build an awareness of data terminology.
- Examine data use in early childhood settings.
- Distinguish between multiple sources of data.
- Analyze differences in data to make informed decisions for continuous improvement.

HIGH-QUALITY TEACHING PRACTICES

Creating high-quality early childhood programs that result in positive outcomes for young children starts with intentionally planning the teaching and learning that takes place within each classroom. The High-Quality Teaching Practices Module equips early childhood professionals with the knowledge and skills to implement high-quality teaching practices within their center-based environments.

Training Outcomes

- Define, identify, and explore essential components of high-quality teaching practices.
- Explore a toolkit of activities and vocabulary to integrate day-to-day teaching with professional standards.
- Examine strategies for program leaders to assess current infrastructure and instructional culture.
- Ensure structures and systems improve teaching and support ongoing, intentional professional learning.
- Highlight the importance of relationships in learning and intentional planning for meaningful interactions.

INTENSIVE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT MODULE

To have positive impact in the lives of young children, their needs must be addressed within the context of their families. The Intensive Family Engagement Module helps early childhood professionals to partner with families to build mutually respectful, goal-oriented relationships that support strong parent-child relationships, family well-being, and ongoing learning and development for both parents and children.

Training Outcomes

- Explore a school-wide embedded interdisciplinary approach to family engagement efforts.
- Embed a collaborative approach with parents to support children’s participation, health, learning, and development.
- Build family partnerships to help them develop strong ties with elementary schools, community resources, and social networks.
- Examine the differences between family involvement and family engagement.



Chaika Stribling, Early Childhood Specialist

As an Early Childhood Specialist and Educare Core Practices trainer, Chaika supports early childhood professionals in continuously improving the quality of teaching and learning in classrooms. Chaika's background is different from many early childhood professionals. She studied classical music and worked as an actress in Chicago for a period of time. Her artistic experience uniquely positioned her as an early childhood educator in Flint. "It became so rewarding. I never wanted to be a teacher, but I saw the uniqueness in myself compared to the other teachers," Chaika said.

Chaika is from Flint and sees herself in many of the children she serves. Chaika explains, "You have to reach the child where they are," and acknowledge what they are doing correctly versus what they are not. Using her music, dance, and acting skills, she connects with children and teachers and gets them to think outside the box. "You do different things for all learners. It helps empower them and gets them to think, 'this is what we are doing and why we are doing it.'"

Growing up in Flint and serving Flint families, Chaika understands the importance of recognizing children’s unique personalities and creating environments that allow their curiosities to flourish. "We are going to thrive," Chaika proclaimed. "We know that we are extremely resilient after the Flint water crisis."



ALIGNING TOGETHER

Coordinated Systems

We envision a seamless and connected birth-to-third grade system in Flint where young children and their families have a healthy start, enter school ready to learn, and thrive for years to come. However, a lack of cohesion between early childhood programs, K-12 systems, and human service agencies limits this vision's potential of coming to life. Therefore, we have committed to creating system-wide solutions for enrollment and shared services that align, link, and stack publicly available resources to develop a more coordinated early education and care system. In service of this commitment, the Flint Early Childhood Collaborative is working to develop a unified enrollment system that will simplify and align enrollment services and processes for publicly-funded early childhood education and care programs in Flint.

UNIFIED ENROLLMENT

In 2019, the Flint Early Childhood Collaborative commissioned a study to examine the availability and accessibility of early childhood programs in Flint and Genesee County for children from birth to age 5. Specifically, this study was commissioned to identify and address existing enrollment challenges, support families, and ultimately create a more efficient, transparent, and equitable process.

We know what we need now more than ever is to connect and collaborate.

The systems and processes currently used by publicly-funded early childhood programs are complicated. Whether in-person, via the Michigan Preschool website, or the citywide enrollment hotline, parents and caregivers struggle to navigate and even understand how placements are made in available early education and care program options. A new citywide enrollment system would provide a single application, timeline, and placement process to all publicly-funded programs.

We aim to partner with early childhood programs to design a unified enrollment system that significantly increases families' access to high-quality options by creating clear and direct ways to enroll all eligible children. Additionally, the new system will give stakeholders and providers the ability to see where access is limited and where service gaps exist while also providing data that informs system-level strategies for early childhood programming within the city and county.

We recognize that fully developing and committing to building a unified enrollment system is not without its complexities and costs. The benefits often associated with adopting such a system require transparency and trust that all partners may not share. However, these surmountable barriers are, according to those who participated in our feasibility study, worth tackling - in exchange for the development of a new system that ultimately would offer Flint's families and providers such benefits as:

- 1. A Prioritized One-Match Offer Process.**
A unified enrollment system sets up safeguards to ensure students are admitted based on the established enrollment rule and procedures and that no applicant is assigned to multiple seats while other applicants receive no seat offer or remain on waitlists for lengthy periods of time.
- 2. A Real-Time Centralized Data System.**
This offers families and providers an accurate picture of program availability and demand. A unified enrollment system provides real-time program availability and application data in a centralized portal that enables system leaders to analyze relative demand and flag any problematic patterns. Such information also would help administrators understand demand geographically, which could shape decisions regarding additional program or classroom needs.
- 3. A More Robust Information and Outreach System.**
This process, created and supported by stakeholders and parents, would offer families year-round support in navigating every aspect of the application process without traveling from program to program. Communities with established unified enrollment systems often create annual citywide enrollment events, community enrollment hubs/ drop-in centers, program directories, and online application portals that allow partners to assist families in selecting the program that best fits the needs of their child.

The dissolution of silos between programs and organizations can improve the level of trust and efficacy among early childhood providers in Flint, which we feel is key to moving Flint's youngest children and their families forward together.





IMPROVING TOGETHER

Data Utilization, Research, and Advocacy

We strive to use our research evidence, practice expertise, and dynamic partnerships to help ensure that all children and families, especially those at the greatest risk, have access to evidence-based, birth-to-five early childhood education and care programs that effectively close the achievement gap. As part of this commitment, the Flint Early Childhood Collaborative employs a range of strategies to scale high-quality early learning practices, including actively contributing to policy change at the local and state levels. Our approach to research and advocacy is centered on four areas: demonstration, dissemination, engagement, and partnering and planning. Our partners participate in opportunities to promote these elements and to support reforms that align and sustain best practices in early childhood education.

DEMONSTRATE

We aim to demonstrate best practices in early childhood education by operating early childhood hubs—Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations—that serve as showcases for high-quality, data-driven programming, embedded professional development, high-quality teaching

practices, and intensive family engagement. We partner with world-class researchers from the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to closely evaluate the effectiveness and impact of practices utilized at the hubs to determine the replicability and scalability of such practices in early childhood programs throughout the city of Flint.

Early childhood professionals, parents, community members, funders, and K-3 partners collaborate through our Research Program Partnership (RPP) to make sense of the data and to develop plans that respond to issues and opportunities revealed through data analysis. This process of continuous improvement informs all of our advocacy efforts.

DISSEMINATE

We disseminate research from our local evaluation partner and the Educare Learning Network that demonstrates the value of high-quality early childhood education programs. Child outcome data is used to validate best practices and to inform the decisions of policymakers and system leaders. Through our Early Education: 101 strategy, we have successfully informed more than 165 policymakers and system leaders about the importance of early childhood education and care.

Through our partnership with Hope Starts Here (Detroit) and the Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative (Grand Rapids), we have held three Early Education: 101 sessions with lawmakers at the state capitol to raise awareness about issues concerning early childhood education and care. More than 80 parents from Flint, Grand Rapids, and Detroit have organized to put the needs of young children and their families on the radar of lawmakers before legislative sessions. One parent described the impact of the experience: "I realized that I was making change and a difference in the school and in the community as well. That really motivated me to continue to advocate for early childhood education."

ENGAGE

We understand that no single person or organization, alone, can solve the most nuanced and complex issues

in our early education and care system. Therefore, we engage local leaders in policy efforts and provide policy-related tools and resources available from the Educare Learning Network and Start Early (formerly the Ounce of Prevention Fund) to support partners in developing individualized policy and advocacy plans.

The Genesee Early Childhood Education Leadership & Advocacy Committee was established in 2020 to align the advocacy efforts of early childhood stakeholders throughout Genesee County. The Flint Early Childhood Collaborative, Childcare Network, the Flint & Genesee Literacy Network, and the Great Start Collaborative co-convened this committee to identify shared priorities that would be articulated on a joint advocacy agenda. When completed, this advocacy agenda will align the efforts of the four key early childhood advocacy organizations in Genesee County.

PARTNER AND PLAN

Using our shared policy agenda, we seek to proactively partner and plan with local- and state-level early childhood leaders and administrators to identify policy barriers and elevate, validate, and prioritize policy reforms and innovations that will allow high-quality programs to sustain their levels of quality and increase access to evidence-based practices.



Ann-Marie Faria, Principle Researcher, American Institutes for Research

Ann-Marie has always been interested in improving outcomes for children. After serving as a teacher for a few years, she realized she wasn't able to solve the big-picture issues that impacted children. With that in mind, she went back to school and earned a PhD in developmental psychology, focusing on early childhood development. Working for the American Institutes for Research for the past 11 years, Ann-Marie has worked closely with Head Start and state-funded early childhood programs to solve the big-picture issues that inspired her interests as a researcher.

Ann-Marie explains, "In working with Educare, there are a few features that make it compelling work. We are a part of this national network. We have communities of research, and we all come together to analyze the data, pool the data across the network, and can learn from the expertise of the network." Within the local work, she has adored working with Educare Flint staff, having frequent check-in schedules with these people and all come together to review the data.

"Educare Flint and Cummings are lucky to have such good data." Years of research and evidence already taken from the Educare Learning Network demonstrates that the Educare model works. Ann-Marie supports Flint partners in discovering why the model is effective in Flint and how it can be replicated in other center-based early childhood settings. Without the data – this would be unachievable.

"As a researcher, a lot of my work is trying to bring people together and learn more about different perspectives. We have interesting and hard conversations about racism so we aren't biased in our research. As a Foster mom, I really value the commitment to national confidence. This is what makes the work so strong and meaningful. There is a real openness. People really want to dig into the data and see what's happening. In all of our research, we have to be careful of examining not just deficit focus but also strength focus and Our families really do have so many strengths especially neighborhood connections, and emotional support."



GIRL
genius

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Foundation for Flint
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Zachary Smith

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CUMMINGS
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