



Flint  
Early Childhood  
Collaborative

# Flint Early Childhood Collaborative Newsletter

BUILDING FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE  
APRIL 2022



## Welcome!

Our first quarterly newsletter of 2022 highlights the tremendous work of our partners in establishing the groundwork for substantive and sustainable improvements in Genesee County's system of early care and education.

During this first quarter, we welcomed children and families back to Cummings Great Expectations after a devastating event in 2021 led to the temporary closure of the center. We also welcomed seven new Parent Ambassadors at Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations, who are preparing to leave their mark on our local system of early care and education. We continued our partnership with Child Care Network to host the second annual Home-Based Provider conference, engaging more than 130 Michigan-based Family Child Care Providers. Our Research-Program Partnership has made substantial strides toward our research agenda and is launching efforts to improve kindergarten transitions. Finally, our Coordinated Eligibility and Enrollment efforts got underway with the first System Design Steering Committee meeting convened.

Needless to say, 2022 is shaping up to be another sensational year for the Flint Early Childhood Collaborative and our partners. As you review the updates from this past quarter, we hope you are inspired by our efforts to build foundations for the future. We value your continued partnership and look forward to sharing this work with you.



**Ja'Nel Jamerson**

Educare Flint and  
Flint Early Childhood Collaborative

# Coming Together For Flint Families & Children In Light Of Tragedy

HIGH QUALITY TEACHING

to enhance home learning environments. Through our partnership with the Food Bank of Eastern Michigan, Cummings Great Expectations provided families with food supplies to offset the unintended consequences of meals not being provided by the school.

Cummings Great Expectations welcomed a portion of children and families back into the school in early April. As we prepare to welcome more children and families back to Cummings over the next few months, many preparations are being made to restore the school to a new glory.

Michelle explained, "This has been heavier than the pandemic was, but (we) are continuing to work hard to prepare our scholars." While this has been a difficult time, it has indeed shown the resilience and determination of the Cummings students, families, and staff.

The night of November 22, 2021 began as any routine Monday night when, suddenly, a loud explosion reverberated across Genesee County, destroying the homes of numerous Flint residents and damaging Cummings Great Expectations. Cummings Great Expectations School Director, Michelle Townsend, recalls the evening vividly. "I was sitting at home when I heard it," explained Michelle. "My husband is a police officer and quickly learned that there was an explosion near Cummings."

Michelle sprung into action without hesitation, heading to the school to assess the damage. That night, school leaders and public safety personnel walked through the building, finding blown-out windows, a damaged courtyard, and countless classroom supplies and fixtures destroyed. "There were times that we just stood there in shock," Michelle recalled.

The clean-up would take months, but support for families began instantaneously. Within two days of the explosion, the Cummings teaching staff were operating programs through virtual instruction and in-person at satellite locations, including Educare Flint and Summerfield. "Our staff did an amazing job connecting with our families," Michelle shared. Diapers and formula were available for families in need. Teachers began delivering educational materials to families



**”** This has been heavier for the staff than the pandemic was, but our teachers are continuing to work hard to prepare our scholars. **”**

Michelle Townsend,  
Cummings Principal



# Parent Ambassadors Are Driving Change For The Entire Community

*INTENSIVE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT*

The Flint Early Childhood Collaborative and its partners are excited to launch a new year of the Parent Ambassador initiative, led by Katy Nunn, the Parent Navigator at Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations. While new to this role, anyone would be hard-pressed to find someone with a stronger skill set than Katy for this role. As a social worker, Katy has the education, experience, and determination to ensure that Cummings Great Expectations and Educare Flint families have access to the information that is vital to success. “The power lies in having the information, and I want to make sure our families have the information they need,” Katy reflected.

“I want to empower families to make the changes in the community that they want to see,” explained Katy. Many parents don’t feel comfortable speaking with civic leaders and policymakers. Still, Katy envisions a future where parents are engaged as experts and equal partners in early education systems. “If one person goes to a city council meeting, they can share the perspectives of other parents and also report back to the group on what is happening,” she shared.

Katy has big plans for her first year, including creating a parent alumni network, implementing a Civics 101 course, and facilitating a 6-week mindfulness course. While Katy is excited about these initiatives, she is most excited to learn what the Parent Ambassadors are passionate about and develop programs that leverage those passions. Listening sessions are currently underway to get that critical feedback. “Parents will lead the focus of the group,” explained Katy.

The alumni network is another component that Katy is particularly excited about. This will be new for Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations. Parent Alumni will serve as mentors for current parents and provide a platform for former Educare Flint and Cummings parents to remain connected with the schools and each other.



Click Here



to learn about  
Parent Ambassadors!



**Katy Nunn**

# Building Capacity Within The Home-Based Provider Sector

ENHANCED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



managing small businesses within their homes, Family Child Care providers often struggle to manage the line between work and leisure, resulting in providers being over-extended with unclear boundaries for families. Ms. Caldwell's presentation offered tips on setting boundaries through program policies and business practices, allowing providers to better manage their work-life balance.

Dr. Nefertiti Poyner gave a presentation entitled Building Your Bounce: 23 Questions That Can Change The Way You Look At Life. Job stress for educators is at an all-time high, as they are being forced to cope with continuous changes and increased demands. Dr. Poyner gave an uplifting and inspirational message, leading Family Child Care providers to understand how to be more resilient amid increased demands. Dr. Poyner's experience as an early childhood educator allowed her to intimately connect with providers.

Plans are already underway for the 2023 conference, with hopes of increasing the participation of Family Child Care providers and continuing to offer relevant professional development opportunities in the future.

An essential goal of the Flint Early Childhood Collaborative is to support the growth and effectiveness of childcare professionals throughout Genesee County's entire early education system. Family Child Care Providers play a unique role within the early childhood system, providing small ratios, family-centered relationships, and neighborhood-based locations for mixed-aged groups. Despite the value Family Child Care providers offer within communities, few professional development opportunities are available that highlight the unique skills and benefits of Family Child Care providers. To address this issue, FECC continued its partnership with the Child Care Network to offer the second annual Home-Based Provider Conference in February.

This year's conference was expanded beyond Genesee County to create connections between Family Child Care providers throughout Michigan. More than 130 providers from 24 counties participated in the conference, which included a keynote address from Dr. Nefertiti Poyner from the world-renowned Devereux Institute for Resilient Children.

Family Child Care providers face very unique challenges that are not generally experienced by center-based child care providers. This conference provides a space to help develop skills that position Family Child Care providers to continue providing the highest possible quality of child care for Michigan's children and families. While planning the conference, partners were deliberate in ensuring that each session spoke directly to the experiences of Family Child Care providers. "We surveyed home-based providers to learn specifically what they wanted," shared Annette Sobocinski, Executive Director of Child Care Network.

One interesting session was facilitated by Danielle Caldwell—a Family Child Care provider from Wisconsin—entitled You Are Worthy: Policies And Practices For Family Child Care. In



**Dr. Nefertiti Poyner**

# The Research-Program Partnership Seeks To Develop Innovative Approaches To Improve Transitions From Pre-K To Kindergarten For Black Families

RESEARCH



The transition from preschool to kindergarten is a significant milestone in which our community's youngest learners begin their journeys toward academic success in Flint Community Schools. However, this transition can be a confusing experience for many families, fraught with unclear requirements that often result in families not accessing the programs of their choice. The Flint Early Childhood Collaborative's Research-Program Partnership (RPP) is working to improve the transition from preschool to kindergarten by understanding families' challenges and developing innovative interventions that improve families' experiences.

FECC's local evaluation partner, the American Institutes for Research (AIR), pursued the Education, Innovation, and Research (EIR) grant from the U.S. Department of Education to enhance kindergarten transitions in Flint. This effort resulted in the RPP receiving a five-year award from the U.S. Department of Education for the initiative, scheduled to begin during the 2022/23 school year. The RPP will serve approximately 400 transitioning Pre-K scholars, 370 families, and 228 Flint educators through this project.

Recognizing that racial biases are embedded within all systems, this project aims to bring about greater collaboration among educators, more culturally competent instruction, improved advocacy skills for Black families, increased school readiness, and positive racial identity.

The first two years will serve as a testing ground at Educare Flint, Cummings Great Expectations, and Durant-Tuuri Mott Elementary School—involving intensified professional development opportunities for educators. In the third year of the initiative, the model will be expanded to other schools across Flint. We envision a standardized approach that can be scaled within Flint by year five, allowing children, families, and educators to better support equitable transitions into elementary school.





# Speak Up For The Children.

ADVOCACY



Children’s experiences in their first five years shape their brains and bodies in lasting ways, a conclusion that has been validated by more than two decades of research and practice. Despite stronger understandings of what children and families need to thrive, several economic, social and systemic factors continue to make it difficult for parents to give it to them. The Flint Early Childhood Collaborative and its partners are working to prevent this cycle by convening the Genesee Early Childhood Leadership and Advocacy Committee as a platform to influence improvements in educational policy and practice.

With support from FECC, Child Care Network, the Flint & Genesee Literacy Network, and the Genesee County Great Start Collaborative, The Genesee Early Childhood Leadership and Advocacy Committee has established an advocacy agenda to improve access and equity within early childhood programs in Flint and throughout the state of Michigan.

The advocacy agenda consists of four priorities:

## Who Will Speak Up For The Children? WE WILL

### » Build a Thriving Early Childhood Workforce

We know that professionals in early childhood programs engage in complex and creative work teaching, caring for, and supporting the healthy development of young children. They often do so with limited resources and inadequate compensation—challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff that care for and educate our youngest citizens during such a critical period of life are among the lowest-paid professionals in the education sector. These factors limit programs’ ability to attract, hire, and retain highly skilled staff.

In addition to adequate wages, educators need professional learning support and training that enhance their current practices and build opportunities for growth in their careers. Often parents themselves, early childhood professionals are being stretched and stressed beyond capacity as they continue to support children and families within schools and communities across Michigan. Therefore, we support policies and investments designed to improve early childhood practice and encourage career growth to build a thriving early childhood workforce.

[LEARN MORE](#)

[TAKE ACTION](#)

### » Reduce Barriers to Early Care and Education

Many families struggle with the childcare cost burden. Many more families – including those working during non-traditional hours, parents with infants and toddlers, and student parents– experience additional unique barriers to accessing childcare that deserves attention. Research shows that access to high-quality care and services improves key educational, economic, and social outcomes by developing skills and promoting young children’s healthy development. Without them, kiddos enter kindergarten behind their peers and stay behind. To ensure all children experience the benefits of high-quality care, we support policies and investments designed to reduce barriers to early care and education.

[LEARN MORE](#)

[TAKE ACTION](#)

### » Ensure That Race, Income, and Adverse Experiences Do Not Determine Children’s Destinies

Too many children are served by programs and caregivers who do not adequately meet a family’s cultural or linguistic preferences. We also know that racial bias within the education system has meant that the contributions, strengths, and needs of Black, Latinx, and Indigenous individuals — particularly women, who represent the majority of the early childhood workforce — have historically been undervalued, under-resourced, and not viewed as the sources of innovation that they genuinely are. The result is that many of the practitioners, children, and families we serve experience inequitable access and outcomes in early care and education. To combat these realities, we support policies and investments that ensure race, income, and adverse experiences do not determine children’s destinies.

[LEARN MORE](#)

[TAKE ACTION](#)

### » Give Children a Healthy Start

All young children need nurturing caregivers and support that help them grow and flourish, along with opportunities to play and learn with other children. Yet across Michigan, young children with developmental delays or disabilities face barriers to accessing inclusive, quality early learning and receiving the appropriate services that meet their developmental needs. We believe that for all children to thrive, we need increased investments designed to address barriers to the inclusion of children with developmental delays or disabilities in early childhood programs. Therefore, we support policies that ensure children are healthy and remain on track developmentally.

[LEARN MORE](#)

[TAKE ACTION](#)



# Coordinated Enrollment Systems: Understanding The Myths & Facts Of Creating Community Led Processes & Policies

COORDINATED SYSTEMS

Flint's families face significant barriers when enrolling their children in early childhood education programs. Processes and program options are unclear and cause frustration, resulting in unnecessary barriers to accessing programs. To address these barriers, the Flint Early Childhood Collaborative (FECC) continues to make strides toward developing and implementing a Coordinated Eligibility and Enrollment (CEE) system for Flint and Genesee County. Genesee County has the unique opportunity to improve how families access early care and education services in Genesee County, ensuring they benefit from the full range of services.

Our first step in re-designing the current enrollment systems in Genesee County is coordinating with parents, child care providers, and early childhood stakeholders through a System Design Steering Committee, responsible for creating a timeline for the CEE work, establishing system priorities and policies, and providing oversight for system changes and audits. The first CEE System Design Steering Committee meeting was held in early April and was co-convened by the Flint & Genesee Literacy Network. Additional sessions are scheduled for April 29 and May 13.

## Innovation & System Design: How we build together...

In addition to convening a System Design Steering Committee of local stakeholders, FECC and the Genesee Intermediate School District (GISD) are actively participating in a statewide Community of Practice (CoP), convened by the Offices of Great Start, to build capacity in advancing CEE efforts in Michigan. The goal is to understand how we can potentially use pilot efforts to maximize current resources and use our findings from pilot CEE efforts to create an aligned policy agenda to pursue and sustain resources through federal, state, and local funding.

As this work continues to move forward, we know there are program providers, partners, and families who will have questions and concerns. We also know from our feasibility study that clear misconceptions exist about the impact of CEE systems on communities. We've compiled some of the myths and facts about what we've heard and will continue to update these as we move forward.

