



Flint
Early Childhood
Collaborative

Flint Early Childhood Collaborative Newsletter

BUILDING BRIDGES FOR THE NEXT
GENERATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD
EDUCATION | JUNE 2022



Welcome!

As yet another school year comes to an end, the Flint Early Childhood Collaborative and our partners are preparing to celebrate a monumental milestone as the first cohort of Educare Flint students who enrolled as infants will be transitioning to kindergarten. This moment not only signifies a major accomplishment of our students and their families, but it is also illustrative of why FECC exists—to create the best possible opportunities for Flint children and their families during their earliest years. These 17 children and their families demonstrate the value of intentional investments in early care and education, with each child entering kindergarten ready to learn, grow, and discover. In addition to FECC's high-quality teaching and learning efforts at Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations, partners continued strengthening the local early childhood landscape through intensive family engagement, enhanced professional development, advocacy, research, and coordinated systems.

Parent Ambassadors honors mothers and fathers at Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations with Mothers' and Fathers' Day celebrations in May and June. In addition to acknowledging the tireless contributions parents make to our schools, Parent Ambassadors partnered with El Ballet Folklorico Estudiantil and Kuungana African Drum and Dance Company to provide entertainment for families while highlighting rich traditions from across the Latino and African diasporas.

With support from partners, Michigan Department of Education (MDE) and Genesee Intermediate School District (GISD), Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations continued their partnership with Pondera Leadership Consulting to provide enhanced professional development training for Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations staff, focusing on managing difficult conversations. We also hosted a full day professional development session for staff with early childhood educational specialist, Chazz Lewis, which focused on emotional regulation in children and teachers' responses to developmentally appropriate behavior.

The Genesee Early Childhood Leadership and Advocacy Committee made substantial strides toward our advocacy agenda, developing an advocacy toolkit to guide and align the early childhood advocacy efforts of Genesee County stakeholders. The Committee also took action on several early childhood policy proposals, state budget negotiations, and the federal budget reconciliation.

FECC and the American Institute for Research (AIR) continued preparations for the roll-out of the Education, Innovation, and Research (EIR) kindergarten transition project in Flint. To support local stakeholders, FECC and AIR convened a panel of national experts, who will guide the progression of the kindergarten transition activities for the next five years.

As we continue our efforts toward creating a seamless and aligned system of early childhood services for children and families, we look forward to expanding our partnerships and reaching more children! If you missed the Q1 newsletter, [click here](#) to review it.



Ja'Nel Jamerson

*Educare Flint and
Flint Early Childhood Collaborative*





Past, Present, & Future of Children at Educare Flint & Cummings Great Expectations

HIGH QUALITY TEACHING

Like the students, the staff at Educare Flint have learned and grown over the past five years, with families supporting us to develop the best practices for delivering strong outcomes for the children and families we serve. “Through Intensive Family Engagement practices, we are able to show families the passion we have for helping the child and family thrive. They begin to see themselves as their child’s teacher and advocate and are excited to pass this gift forward to other parents and families. They become a part of the Educare family, and that bond is something that lasts a lifetime” explained, Dr. Jodi Ramos, Director of Early Childhood Programs. We know this is only the beginning for our scholars! As our scholar’s transition to kindergarten, Educare Flint hopes to remain a bridge for families as they navigate the K-12 system. To do this, Parent Ambassadors are launching the Educare Flint Alumni Network to support families in kindergarten and beyond. “Parent Ambassadors are excited to begin the work of building long-lasting partnerships with our families” explained Katy Nunn, Educare Flint and Cummings Parent Navigator, “we are excited to stay connected and continue support well into the future”.

The close of the 2021-2022 school year makes a momentous occasion for Educare Flint, as the first cohort of infants, who began at Educare Flint between the ages of six weeks and six months, are transitioning from pre-school to kindergarten. Educare Flint was established in the wake of the Flint water crisis to combat the potentially damaging effects of young children’s exposure to lead and other harmful contaminants through the public drinking water system. In celebrating this monumental milestone, Educare Flint is reflecting on the past, celebrating the present, and preparing for the future.

A bridging ceremony was held for 36 Educare Flint pre-school students on June 24, 2022, giving each child a moment to celebrate their accomplishment with their past and current teachers, families and other staff that played key roles in their experience at Educare Flint. Families participated in an outdoor drive-thru event, highlighting key moments from their children’s past experiences at Educare Flint and their ambitions for their futures. Students shared goals of becoming paleontologists, excavator operators, doctors, dentists, teachers, and even a “wrestler who saves people!” No matter what children’s aspirations are, Educare Flint’s staff are proud to have played a role in supporting the students and their families in making them a reality.





Parent Ambassadors Host Mother's & Father's Day Celebrations at Educare Flint & Cummings Great Expectations

INTENSIVE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

According to Start Early, family engagement during the earliest years of a child's life is one of the most powerful predictors of a child's development. Families are children's first teachers, and the quality of parent-child relationships and interactions create the foundational skills that children need to be successful in school and life. Families consistently go above and beyond at Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations not only to ensure that their children are successful, to ensure the success of children throughout Genesee County. This is done through the Parent Ambassadors and FECC research efforts, which more than 90% of Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations families have participated in. To recognize the countless contributions of Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations families, Parent Ambassadors hosted Mother's Day and Fathers' Day celebrations, acknowledging all the special adults in the lives of our students.

For Mother's Day, Parent Ambassadors sponsored gifts for female caregivers ranging from self-care kits to a raffle that included a spa-themed gift basket and gift card to a local spa. "The event was nice" stated Cummings raffle winner and mother, Shantara Spicer-Johnson. "It was so lovely to take a moment for myself. I enjoyed getting my nails done and seeing services provided at Summerset Spa. I am definitely going back to use other services they have, like getting a massage for myself." Keeping family mental well-being at the core of decisions, Katy Nunn, Parent Navigator at Educare Flint and Cummings, explained, "After communicating with Leann Hobson, the Educare Flint Family Engagement Advocate, we knew we wanted to ensure the mothers felt special while focusing on themselves first and self-care. We wanted the moms to feel special and take a quick moment to talk, receive love and do something that feels good."

For Father's Day, Parent Ambassadors sponsored gifts for male caregivers that promoted the theme "Dads Make a Difference." Mike Kildee, Educare Flint and Cummings Family Engagement Coordinator, says, it is a balance between both parent's engagement that leads to the child success, but "the engagement of the father helps children grow and develop with a broader view of the world and people around them." Eugene Blackwell, Educare Flint Father, shared his excitement and explained, "it is so important for fathers to support their children and education." With support from the Red Nose Day grant from Start Early, Parent Ambassadors also partnered with Kuungana African Drum and Dance Company to host a special performance for student and families at Educare Flint.



Educare Flint & Cummings Great Expectations Strengthen Education & Family Support Services

ENHANCED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Enhanced professional development is a key driver for all areas of the Flint Early Childhood Collaborative's work in Flint. By equipping early childhood professionals with knowledge and understanding about how evidence-based and emerging practices can improve the quality of instruction and family support services, FECC and its partners are working to increase collaboration among early educators and families. As the 2021-22 school year comes to a close, Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations are gearing up for the 2022-23 school year with a series of professional development offerings aimed at strengthening communication between educators and centering children within the context of their families. With the support from the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) and Genesee Intermediate School District (GISD), Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations hosted two full-day professional development sessions with Rob Elliot of Pondera Leadership Consulting and Chazz Lewis, Educational Specialist.

Feedback: It's a Gift!

Beginning in 2021 FECC piloted an enhance professional development initiative that aims to support strong leadership among school staff at Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations, including the Pondera Virtual Advisor — a professional inventory assessment. To culminate this experience, Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations staff participated in Feedback: It's a Gift!, a training from Pondera Leadership Consulting focused on strategies staff can utilize when managing difficult conversations, including receiving and delivering challenging feedback. "Innovation happens at the intersection of necessity and discomfort," explained Ja'Nel Jamerson, Executive Director of the Flint Early Childhood

Collaborative and Educare Flint. "Too often, opportunities for innovation are missed because we are uncomfortable with challenging conversations. This training aimed to address this by highlighting the value of constructive feedback for early childhood professionals in all capacities."

Teachers Changing The World

Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations staff hosted early childhood educational specialist, Chazz Lewis, for a professional development session focused on centering children within the context of their families in early childhood education. Mr. Lewis, a former Montessori teacher, encouraged Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations' staff to push back against "old-school fear-based, control-based techniques," to move toward authentic partnership with families. As Mr. Lewis explained, centering the child and family through strong parent-child systems can increase student achievement and family outcomes.



"Two things that stuck with me are, 'Mistakes are an essential part of the learning process' and 'be an improviser...'" explained Dr. Jodi Ramos, Educare Flint School Director. This opportunity created a moment for staff to have fun while learning to apply the knowledge gained in their classrooms to improve partnerships with families.

The FECC Research-Program Partnership Convenes Nationally Renowned Experts to Guide the Development of the Kindergarten Transition Activities in Flint

RESEARCH



Flint Early Childhood Collaborative's (FECC) local evaluation partner, the American Institutes for Research (AIR) was selected as the recipient of an Education, Innovation, and Research (EIR) grant from the U.S. Department of Education to engage the Research-Program Partnership (RPP) in bringing about greater collaboration among educators, more culturally competent instruction, improve advocacy skills for families, increased school readiness, and positive racial identity. The project's ultimate goal is to promote positive outcomes for families and children, with a focus on social-emotional well-being and positive racial identity during the transition into Flint Community Schools. To support the RPP in developing and implementing kindergarten transition interventions, FECC and AIR have convened a panel of national experts who will partner with the RPP for the next five years.

Panelists include:



Dr. Iheoma Iruka

Founding Director of the Equity Research Action Coalition - University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Iheoma U. Iruka, PhD, is a Research Professor in the Department of Public Policy, a Fellow at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute (FPG) and the Founding Director of the Equity Research Action Coalition at FPG (the Coalition). She is leading projects and initiatives focused on ensuring that minoritized children and children from low-income households, especially Black children, are thriving. Her work is focused on ensuring excellence for young diverse learners, especially Black children and their families, through the intersection of anti-bias, anti-racist, culturally grounded research, program, and policy. Some areas of focus include family engagement and support, quality rating and improvement systems, and early care and education system and programs. She serves and has served on numerous national and local boards and committees, including the National Advisory Committee for the U.S. Census Bureau, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, the American Psychological Association's Board of Educational Affairs, Brady Education Foundation, and Trust for Learning.



Latrice Brown

Lead Public Health Navigator - City of Flint

Latrice Brown is the Lead Public Health Navigator for the City of Flint. As an Educare Flint parent, lead Parent Ambassador, and former AmeriCorps service member, Latrice is intimately aware of the importance of family engagement to children's success. In addition to serving as the parent representative on the expert panel, Latrice will provide a unique perspective on health considerations that should be addressed through EIR interventions.



Cynthia Jackson

Senior Vice President & Executive Director-Educare Learning Network Start Early

Cynthia D. Jackson leads the Educare Learning Network, a generative, coast-to-coast network of high-quality birth-to-five schools that function as innovative learning labs for the field of early childhood education. In her dual role as Senior Vice President at Start Early (formerly known as the Ounce), she works alongside other senior leaders to advance the organization's mission. In collaboration with the Buffett Early Childhood Fund, Educare Learning Network school leaders and other early childhood stakeholders, Cynthia advances practice, research and policy solutions to create greater system wide impact. Prior to joining Start Early, she served as national director of training and technical assistance for Healthy Families America at Prevent Child Abuse America and director of the Midwest Learning Center for Family Support at Family Focus, Inc. Cynthia holds a master's degree in counseling and health education from the University of North Texas.



Portia Kennel

Senior Advisor (Ret.) - Buffett Early Childhood Fund

Prior to the Buffett Early Childhood Fund, in her long tenure as the Senior Vice President of Program Innovation at the Ounce of Prevention Fund, Ms. Kennel designed, implemented and scaled effective, research-based early childhood education and family support models. In 2000, she created the first Educare School in Chicago to serve children from birth to 5 years old and led the expansion of the program to many diverse communities across the country. As the Executive Director of the Educare Learning Network, Ms. Kennel lead efforts to engage and empower parents as a force for change in their families, schools and communities. Her work is grounded in an understanding of family systems and clinical issues related to working with families in low-income communities.



The Genesee Early Childhood Leadership & Advocacy Committee Gains Traction on its 2022-24 Advocacy Agenda

ADVOCACY



The Genesee Early Childhood Leadership and Advocacy Committee developed its 2022-24 advocacy agenda to articulate local and state policy priorities that improve Michigan’s early childhood sector for children, their families, and the professionals who serve them. To complement the advocacy agenda, the Committee has developed an Advocacy Toolkit to provide information and tools to early childhood stakeholders who are interested in speaking up for the children of Genesee County.

Only three months after establishing the advocacy agenda, local stakeholders are already making progress toward its priorities of:

1 Building a thriving early childhood workforce;

2 Reducing barriers to early care and education;

3 Ensuring the race, income, and adverse experiences do not determine children’s destinies; and

4 Giving children a health start.



Infant -Toddler Contracts & Family Child Care Networks

Seven Genesee County stakeholders sent letters to state senators, expressing their support for a package of childcare bills that create regional family child care networks (HB 5043) and infant-toddler contracts for child care providers (HB 5044). Senator Jeff Irwin expressed his gratitude for stakeholders’ input, indicating that “these important bills will greatly assist our current child care facilities and providers, and help expand assistance for emerging caregivers.” The bills have since passed the Senate and are headed to Governor Whitmer for signature.

Federal Proposal to Expand Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library in Genesee County

The Flint & Genesee Literacy Network (FGLN) and Flint Early Childhood Collaborative (FECC) collaborated to submit a request to Congressman Dan Kildee for support of a countywide expansion of the Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library in Genesee County, which was included in his \$46.8 million budget proposal. If adopted in the 2023 federal budget reconciliation, FGLN will lead the initiative’s expansion through the Genesee Reads initiative, which will engage cross-sector stakeholders in promoting a culture of early literacy in Genesee County. Kildee told M-Live, “We worked hard to secure federal funding for last year’s community projects, and we’ll work even harder this year to deliver for mid-Michigan.” “These local projects in mid-Michigan will help to grow our economy, support public safety, strengthen our neighborhoods and improve services for families,” Kildee explained.

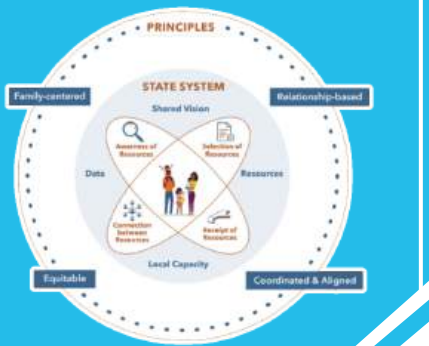
Learn more about Congressman Kildee’s budget proposal here



FECC Concludes System Design Convenings with Clear Direction for Genesee County's New Coordinated Enrollment System

COORDINATED SYSTEMS

FECC has coordinated with parents, child care providers, and early childhood stakeholders through a System Design Steering Committee to establish system priorities for a new coordinated eligibility and enrollment (CEE) system in Genesee County.



The System Design Steering Committee has articulated a set of system needs and features that will be used to guide the development of a technology tool that will be rolled-out Spring 2023. FECC will now engage partners in determining how programs, families, and stakeholders will engage with and collaborate through the system to ensure families experience barrier-free access to high-quality early care and education programs in Genesee County.

[CLICK HERE TO SEE THE FULL SET OF SYSTEM NEEDS AND FEATURES SET TO ROLL OUT SPRING 2023](#)

